

THE MODERNITY OF THOMAS HARDY'S
ETHICAL VISION

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INTRODUCTION

In a previous study of Jude the Obscure, I suggested that one of the major reasons for readers' failure to evaluate Thomas Hardy's characters satisfactorily is that we have not recognized his "modern" qualities, modern insights and concerns. Critics have been unable to justify Hardy's greatness even though they know that he is a giant among fiction writers. Yet Hardy's work endures, and if critics cannot explain or describe its qualities in terms of the commonly used critical approaches, they must become more flexible than they have been and attempt new approaches. To treat Hardy as a kind of bête noir among English novelists, a shallow thinker and stylistic bungler who succeeds in spite of his obvious shortcomings, is neither an adequate critical estimate, nor is it fair to Hardy and the legions of readers who admire his works. In our efforts to come to grips with this powerful writer, "a different critical approach is called for, one that acknowledges Hardy's modernness, at least in some of the works, and evaluates him in the light of modern thought."¹

This dissertation responds to the need for a new approach and attempts to define and reconstruct Hardy's modern ethical thinking about man in the modern world. The study is restricted to Jude the Obscure, Hardy's final and most modern novel, and those short poems which contribute to an understanding of his cosmic vision. The reason for including the poetry is that in the poems Hardy deals with certain modern questions such as the nature of God and man's relationship to Him, which he could not treat so openly in the fiction.

"Poetry. Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion -- hard as a rock -- which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel -- which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries -- will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it into argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist, which in their crass illiteracy they seem to think is the same thing....If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone."²

It is clear, even in this short quotation, that Hardy's religious ideas are unorthodox. Like Leslie Stephen, "the man whose philosophy was to influence

Hardy's own for many years, indeed, more than that of any other contemporary" (Life, 100). Hardy knows that "the old ideals have become obsolete, and the new are not yet constructed....We cannot write living poetry on the ancient model. The gods and heroes are too dead, and we cannot seriously sympathize with...the idealized prize-fighter" (Life, 308). Furthermore, Hardy recognizes that in treating provisional philosophies and feelings in his published works, he is dealing with the most current intellectual ideas.

'I suppose I have handicapped myself by expressing, both in [The Dynasts] and in previous verse, philosophies and feelings as yet not well established or formally adopted into the general teaching; and by thus over-stepping the standard boundary set up for the thought of the age by the proctors of opinion, I have thrown back my chance of acceptance in poetry by many years. The very fact of my having tried to spread over art the very latest illumination of the time has darkened counsel in respect of me!' (Life, 320)

Hardy thought of himself as a modern writer, but the appearance in his work of contemporary ideas is not what we mean by referring to his modernness. Rather, it is his vision of man and man's relationship to God, the world, and his neighbors that is modern. Certainly the vision grows out of Hardy's assimilation of contemporary thinking, but it should be clear that it is the

artistic synthesis of ideas rather than the individual contemporary references that make his works modern.

Nevertheless, for many readers the very insinuation that Thomas Hardy may be considered a modern writer would evoke a shock of incredulity. The most typical lines of criticism are those which assume in Hardy a narrow belief in pessimistic determinism, with that creed's denial of human freedom, and an abiding respect for and faith in the old agricultural order.³ The domination of Hardy studies by adherents of these misconceptions is understandable and grows out of the basically ironic vision Hardy projects. This dissertation, however, intends to demonstrate that Hardy is quite concerned over man's responsibility to exercise his freedom of choice, and that the old agricultural order occupies him less frequently in his later works than the emerging modern world and the problems that it poses for the conscious person. The prevailing critical opinions, in other words, are both inaccurate insofar as they pretend to "explain" Hardy and inadequate insofar as they overlook or neglect certain crucial aspects of his work. My purpose in this study is to broaden our understanding of Hardy by examining his work in the light of modern thought and by reopening some closed issues.

primarily the questions of freedom and human responsibility.

One of the ironies that emerges from the great bulk of Hardy studies is that Hardy is so unsatisfactorily understood, even though most of his critics will admit that he is not a difficult or elusive writer. In fact, the straightforwardness of Hardy's writings has led some critics to consider him a simple-minded countryman who cannot refrain from displaying his self-taught erudition in novels that are really philosophical tracts. Criticism has focused on the philosophy and neglected the art, the main tendency on the part of critics being to define and evaluate Hardy's "system." In spite of Hardy's insistence that he presents merely "seemings, or personal impressions," and that the logical consistency of philosophical systems is never a concern for him, the critics distort his meaning by trying to mold it into a systematic philosophical pattern. For a long time, critics studied Hardy's novels as though they were illustrations of the philosophy of Schopenhauer. It is still common to hear the novelist spoken of as a pessimist or naturalistic determinist, these assessments being primarily based on the "President of the Immortals" quotation at the end of Tess and the appearance of Darwin's ideas in some of the novels.

The inconsistencies that appear in the books, which reveal the disparity between Hardy's thought and that of his supposed intellectual forebears, are adduced as examples of Hardy's shoddy mind. In effect, the critics rarely get beyond the surface of the works and thus fail to take Hardy on his own terms. The straightforward simplicity of his style suggests a simple mind; the philosophical presentation of ideas suggests a philosophical system which must be examined and criticized before the system can be acceptable in a work of art. Both of these misapprehensions are responsible for the literal-minded, philosophically oriented misconception that has so long stultified Hardy studies.

The second major misconception, concerning Hardy's faith in the old agricultural order, is easily understood given the generally prevalent approach to his works. Certainly Hardy respects the positive cultural values that obtain under the stability of the traditional agricultural way of life. Much of the sympathy and nostalgia in the novels derives from the passing of that order. However, Hardy's books that deal with this important revolution take a much more complex position than one of unequivocal respect for the past way of life and sympathy and sorrow at its dissolution. For one

thing, Hardy has a higher conception of man's potential as a human being than the conception that is embodied in the rustics, who are superstitious, non-moral, and, most importantly, unconscious. Never, in fact, is a rustic the hero of a novel. Rather, the interest generally centers around a conscious individual who has been uprooted from the land or who is unattached to the land. Secondly, the nostalgia and sympathy are often evoked to highlight the plight of a conscious person who, in his alienation, has no stable mooring in a God-forgotten world of unsettled values. Hardy's strategy is to contrast an impossible, though in some respects desirable, tradition with the uncertain actuality his protagonist faces. For the conscious man, there can be no turning back, no reversion to unconsciousness. His tragic dilemma is one of ordering his life in a disordered world.

Though these serious misconceptions about Hardy's pessimistic determinism and his respect for the agricultural order are still prevalent, there is a developing awareness that Hardy cannot so easily be summed up and dismissed. The tags determinist, naturalist, and pessimist, so often applied to Hardy as a thinker, do not adequately circumscribe the complexity of his thought

or the ironical meaning of much of his art. Hardy's limitations as a philosopher do not invalidate his impressions as a writer of fiction. Many of his most important impressions, moreover, have little or nothing to do with the agricultural order.

Most of the criticism, then, has emphasized the traditional bases of Hardy's work and has either failed to come to terms with or has misapprehended his significant preoccupation with modern problems. The most obvious explanation for this failure or misapprehension is that critics are rarely as attuned to the spirit of an age as the age's artists are. No wonder, then, that we have been slow in understanding Hardy's impressions about the modern forces just shaping themselves in the nineteenth century.⁴

Hardy's modernness has eluded us as well because the surface texture of so many of his works is deceptively antiquated. The Wessex country, for example, is populated by hay-trussers and furze-cutters, who speak a timeless dialect replete with archaisms and who have built their homes on the sites of Roman ruins.⁵ Nevertheless, this landscape does give evidence of the emergence of modern times, however indirectly. If mechanized farming, for example, is a product of the

modern era, the machines in The Mayor of Casterbridge and Tess of the D'Urbervilles indicate very clearly the intrusions of modernity upon the ancient landscape. But Hardy is less interested in the machines themselves than in how they have influenced man's life in the modern world. The machines come to symbolize disorder and it is the disorder they introduce into man's lives that engages Hardy's tragic vision. One of the most important and pervasive conflicts in all of the novels, then, is the inevitable and necessary, though in some important respects regrettable, replacement of a traditional order by a new order. This new order, whether in agriculture as in The Mayor and Tess, education as in The Return of the Native, religious practices as in Under the Greenwood Tree, or ethics as in Jude the Obscure, is always symbolized by a modern character: Donald Farfrae, Clym Yeobright, Parson Maybold, and Jude Fawley.⁶

Hardy, then, wrote about the decline and eclipse of a primitive age and the emergence of the modern world. And though he spent most of his adult life away from the centers of modern life, he nevertheless heard and responded to the characteristic beckoning of the modern era, which call Matthew Arnold defined in 1869, the year before Hardy's first novel appeared.

An intellectual deliverance is the peculiar demand of those ages which are called modern; and those nations are said to be imbued with the modern spirit most eminently in which the demand for such a deliverance has been made with the most zeal, and satisfied with most completeness. Such a deliverance is emphatically, whether we will or no, the demand of the age in which we ourselves live. All intellectual pursuits our age judges according to their power of helping to satisfy this demand; of all studies it asks, above all, the question, how far they can contribute to this deliverance.

Hardy is an "intellectual deliverer" in the Arnoldian sense, one who contemplated and communicated the spirit of the age. But it is Arnold, in his essay on "Haine," who defines the overriding modern dilemma and thereby provides a general world-view which is the background from which Hardy's modern works emerge.

Modern times find themselves with an immense system of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs, rules, which have come to them from times not modern. In this system their life has to be carried forward; yet they have a sense that this system is not of their own creation, that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life, that, for them, it is customary, not rational. The awakening of this sense is the awakening of the modern spirit. The modern spirit is now awake almost everywhere; the sense of want of correspondence between the forms of modern Europe and its spirit, between the new wine of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the old bottles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, or even of the sixteenth

and seventeenth, almost everyone now perceives; it is no longer dangerous to affirm that this want of correspondence exists; people are even beginning to be shy of denying it.⁸

Arnold's classic statement is generally adequate in describing the disordered world which both he and Hardy reflected. In their creative works both men clarified and particularized many of the attitudes that we today consider modern: man lives in permanent doubt and intellectual crisis; the traditional beliefs are no longer possible and life is problematical; loneliness and anguish are common moods; the overdevelopment of the intellect causes the diminution or loss of natural appetites; courage consists in accepting pain and refusing the comforts of certainty.

Interestingly enough, the recent critical emphasis on Hardy's poetry has helped considerably in teaching us how to approach his fiction. T. S. Eliot's remark to the effect that Hardy's style in fiction climbs from the ridiculous to the sublime without ever being simply good, has long stigmatized Hardy's reputation as a writer. Many have felt that though Hardy could occasionally create a purple passage, he spent most of his time nodding over his notebooks. This is simply untrue.

Style involves more than the ability to turn out a purple passage now and then. Hardy felt that the secret of having a good style is to appear not to have much style at all. In his fiction, he often used a bare, colorless, "style-less" style to create passages to contrast with more important, more stylish passages. His desired effect is roughly similar to that of painters who use chiaroscuro to achieve dramatic emphasis of details in their paintings.

What should concern the critic of a writer's style, though, is how he achieves that style -- through what techniques, what rhetorical figures, what organic relationships that bear on the whole work. Recently, Hardy scholars have come to recognize the essentially poetic texture of his style, particularly in the latest novels, where poetic devices and techniques abound. This major illumination was long delayed because of the enduring misconception that Hardy is a realist or a naturalist. Also, the critics seem to have overlooked the fact that Hardy was writing poetry throughout his years of novel writing. Nor did they pay much attention to his aesthetic theories. Hardy's conception of art excluded representational realism, as evidenced in a note written in 1890:

Art is a disproportioning -- (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) -- of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventoryly, might possibly be observed, but more probably be overlooked. Hence "realism" is not Art. (Life, 229)

Hardy's realism is not naturalistic; rather, it is poetic realism.¹⁰ His fiction may be classified with Hawthorne's romances, a form of writing defined in the "Preface" to The House of the Seven Gables by contrasting it to the novel.

The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at every minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former -- while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably as far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart -- has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.¹¹

Jude the Obscure is not a naturalistic novel; it is a romance. A. Alvarez suggests that "the power of Jude the Obscure is, then, less fictional than poetic...."¹² Norman Holland writes: 'In no other of the novels is the characterization and social background more realistic, and yet, in none of them is there such a strong tendency for the people and events to become symbols.'¹³ Albert J. Guerard, in his interesting and influential book-length

study, finds Jude, despite its "naturalistic paraphernalia," a haunting symbolic rendition of the modern age as it appeared to a compassionate pessimist.¹⁴

Carol R. Andersen suggests that Hardy's greatest works are novels of theme, and the themes are rendered metaphorically. She notes that Hardy achieves symbolic characterization by means of direct metaphors of enlargement or diminution. Also, through the repeated use of images, such as the bonfire in The Return of the Native, Hardy raises the image to the level of symbol by the accumulation of meanings that attach to it. Miss Andersen points out finally that Hardy very often uses direct symbols in his fiction.¹⁵ F. P. W. McDowell's study of Hardy's use of images and symbols is another of the recent studies that recognize the poetic features in Jude. McDowell relates the images and clusters of images in the novel to the actual lives of Jude and Sue in society. In commenting on Hardy's "purposeful use of contrast," McDowell avers that many of the "parallel incidents provide a symbolic and metaphysical commentary upon the characters and their problems, just as the characters in parallel situations throw light upon one another and the action as a whole."¹⁶

A more enlightened approach to Hardy's work is

possible today because of a willingness to take him seriously as an artist. In view of the recent studies that help to uncover Hardy's subtle artistry and intellectual clarity, it is no longer permissible to insist on deprecating his simplicity and straightforwardness, nor to attack his often perplexing thought. In rushing to judgment, early critics have overlooked, I think, a very important aspect of Hardy's work, his awareness of modern problems. By putting aside some of the chronic misapprehensions regarding Hardy and assuming the more sophisticated approaches to his art, we can proceed to investigate his modern insights.

Modern man in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has experienced the completion of God's gradual withdrawal from the world. The literature of these centuries has often expressed the relation of the individual to a God who has disappeared and not yet reappeared. J. Hillis Miller, in his recent book The Disappearance of God, treats five writers of the nineteenth century whose literary works represent "five examples of the nineteenth century English way of experiencing the disappearance of God."¹⁷ Different as are the heritages of Thomas De Quincey, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, Gerard Manley

Hopkins, and Emily Bronte, and different as are their spiritual adventures, their starting points are strikingly similar -- each somehow begins with the assumption of God's absence from the world.

Thomas Hardy is another of the Victorian writers who witnessed the disappearance of God in modern times. Unlike some of his contemporaries, though, Hardy does not anticipate God's reappearance in the future. In fact, Hardy often indicates that God has died and can no longer be expected to aid man. This study will focus on Hardy's awareness of God's absence and will treat the important conclusions that Hardy draws about the nature of man's ethical experience in the modern world. Because of the disappearance and death of God, modern man finds himself abandoned and alienated in an absurd universe, one in which all established ethical authority has been undermined. Institutionalized Christianity undergoes a moral decadence that manifests itself in forms of legalistic repression of the individual's personal development. The isolated individual must discover his personal liberty and assert, in the absence of authoritative ethical creeds, his ethical dependence on himself alone.

The following themes, then, will be the primary concerns in this study of Hardy's modern ethical thought: the disappearance and death of God; the decline of institutionalized religion and the moral degradation of Christianity; the conscious individual abandoned in an absurd universe; the nature of personal freedom; and the empirical, deductive discovery and creation of ethics by the individual. In discussing Hardy's development of these themes, I shall refer repeatedly to a number of his Victorian contemporaries, such writers as Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and Matthew Arnold. These figures concern themselves in some of their works with the same modern themes that Hardy explores; and by discussing Hardy in relation to them, we can better understand the pervasive concern for modern problems in the Victorian age. Thomas Hardy, in other words, is not the sole modernist of his period. There has been a tendency over the first half of the present century to see the Victorian era as old-fashioned and therefore irrelevant to the modern world. This very attitude has prevented us from understanding how modern that age was. This study, while it is primarily occupied with Thomas Hardy, attempts to view his achievement in the context of an age which continually raised the questions he raises, an age that

provided an intellectual milieu out of which Hardy's thought quite naturally emerges.

In many places I will relate Hardy's works to the writings of existentialists of the last two centuries, such men as Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, continental writers of the nineteenth century; and Nicolas Berdyaev, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre, twentieth century thinkers. It seems to me that all of the modern themes Hardy develops are among the fundamental assumptions of the existentialists; furthermore, Hardy himself is often "existential" in his concern for the primacy of human experiences as opposed to abstraction. While the findings of modern existentialist psychologists, philosophers, and theologians have rarely seemed appropriate for a discussion of Hardy's writings, I feel certain that we must explore precisely those sources for the insights they may lend to Hardy studies.

This thesis is not concerned with determining whether Hardy was consciously influenced by any of the existentialists. It is very unlikely that he knew Kierkegaard at all; his knowledge of both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche was probably slight; and the writings of Berdyaev, Camus, and Sartre appeared after Hardy died.

The matter of influence, in any case, is irrelevant, as it is probable that Hardy arrived at his existential ideas independently, drew them out of the same intellectual ferment in England that produced Carlyle's "Everlasting No" section of Sartor Resartus, published in 1834, nearly a decade before Kierkegaard began writing. There can be no question that the ideas were currently in the air and available to any thinker who wished to pursue them. This study refers to these analysts of man because they have developed a vocabulary suitable for clarifying Hardy's "seemings, or personal impressions" about the plight of man in the modern world.

We can now proceed to a discussion of Hardy's modern ethical thought. Since he never synthesized his ideas in systematic fashion, I have been forced to deal with selections from various works in an effort to delineate his generally consistent thinking.

In the first chapter I shall discuss Hardy's awareness of the disappearance and death of God. As noted above, this awareness is the starting point from which Hardy, with the typically paradoxical vision of a modernist and tragedian, develops his ethical thought without recourse to a God. This is not to say that he ignores God, but rather he sees the need for man to get along without the

God who has abandoned him. The second chapter deals with Hardy's depiction of the decline of religion, a natural development after man confronts God's absence from the world and His consequent inability to influence or control man's affairs. Hardy dramatizes this decline in terms of the physical decay and displacement of religious symbols, and the moral decadence of institutionalized Christianity. God and organized religion are seen as ineffectual, ultimately, in Hardy's modern works.

The third chapter is concerned with modern man's experience of abandonment in an absurd universe and explores a number of the problems he faces in adjusting to the lack of an external ethical authority in the world. Man finally realizes that whatever validity any action of his has derives from his own responsible decisions and choices. The fourth and final chapter inquires into the nature and limits of personal freedom in Hardy, with particular emphasis on Jude the Obscure. Jude Fawley, the hero of the novel, asserts his "personal being" through a series of choices and affirms the importance of personal liberty in his quest for self-realization. It is because Jude can choose that he matters in terms of the ethical standard created by the novel; it is because he chooses to remain free and to

preserve his personal integrity that he can inspire; finally, it is because his choices are made in the modern world that he seems so relevant to modern readers.

NOTES

1. The study referred to is my unpublished University of Florida M.A. thesis on "Freedom and Tragedy in Jude the Obscure." The quoted lines appear on page 24.
2. Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928 (New York, 1921), p. 285. This new edition brings together Mrs. Hardy's two-volume biography, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1891 and The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892-1928, originally published in 1928 and 1930 respectively. Later citations from this edition will be indicated in the text as (Life, p.).
3. Roy Morrell, Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way (Kuala Lumpur, 1955), pp. 1-2. Morrell's opening pages summarize the criticism that perpetrates and perpetuates these misconceptions.
4. However, whatever knowledge we have accumulated should be used in reevaluating the achievement of our great writers, when such knowledge seems appropriate. The history of literary criticism, in fact, is a series of reevaluations based upon new information that is periodically made available to critics of literature. As our understanding of man grows, our appreciation of art is increased; and though we can never fully comprehend our greatest writers' works, we owe it to ourselves and to them to continue searching for methods which reveal new insights.
5. There is in Wesssex a juxtaposition of two world-views, two realities. For the unconscious rustics, who respond to life's events with a fatalistic acceptance of whatever Nature brings, reality can be well summarized by Joan Durbeyfield's reply to Tess when the daughter returns home pregnant: "'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God." [See Tess of the D'Urbervilles (Wessex edition, London, 1920), p. 104. All subsequent references to the novels of Hardy will be taken from this edition.] Hardy's conscious heroes, on the other hand,

experience reality in terms of the cosmic absurdity of the universe and Nature's indifference to man's natural desires. In emphasizing the first, more traditional view of reality, criticism has virtually overlooked the second reality and its important implications, even though such characters as Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright in The Return of the Native, Gabriel Oak in Far From the Madding Crowd, Angel Clare and Tess in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure, to name just the most obvious cases, experience reality in this way.

6. These men are modern in the sense that their ideas and attitudes are formed in the modern world outside Wessex and reflect its most recent development.
7. Matthew Arnold, "Modern Element in Literature," in Essays in Criticism: Third Series (Boston, 1910), p. 37.
8. Matthew Arnold, "Heine," in Essays in Criticism: First Series (London and New York, 1891), pp. 159-60.
9. Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1967), pp. 175-34. In outlining this cluster of assumptions, Howe refers specifically to their relevance in Jude.
10. A. J. Guerard has called Hardy an "anti-realist" and "romantic" in his study Thomas Hardy: The Novels and the Stories (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. 84. Also, William Newton, in his two articles dealing with Hardy and the Naturalists, demonstrates how fundamentally different Hardy's practices are from those of the school of Zola. See "Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists," PQ, XXX (April, 1951), 154-75; and "Hardy and the Naturalists: Their Use of Physiology," MP, XLIX (August, 1951), 28-41.
11. The quotation from Hawthorne's "Preface" is reprinted in Perry Miller et al., editors, Major Writers of America, I (New York, 1962), 290.
12. A. Alvarez, "Afterword" to the Signet edition of Jude the Obscure (New York, 1961), p. 414.
13. Norman Holland, "Jude the Obscure: Hardy's Symbolic Indictment of Christianity," NCF, IX (June, 1954), 40.

14. Guerard, p. 82.
15. C. H. Andersen, "Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy," NCF, IX (December 1954), 192-209.
16. F. P. W. McDowell, "Hardy's 'Seemings, or Personal Impressions': The Symbolic Use of Image and Contrast in Jude the Obscure," MFS, VI (Autumn, 1960), 233-50.
17. J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God, Five Nineteenth-Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 2.

CHAPTER I

For Thomas Hardy, as for so many Western intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, God is no longer present in the world. In one literary work after another, man, in trying to determine his relationship with God, must take into account either the disappearance or the death of God. These are the defining conditions for relating with God; in both instances, modern man can only experience God negatively, as a terrifying absence.¹ The absence of God and the consequent ineffectiveness of religion in Hardy's works correspond to the absence of God and the decline of religion in the modern world.

Hardy's personal sense of God-forsakenness is revealed in a note which appears in his autobiography. The note is dated January 29, 1890.

I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him. As an external personality, of course--the only true meaning of the word. (Life, 284)

Hardy experienced the void in the universe created by the departure of God, and that experience is the foundation of his modern ethical thought. In the poetry especially, Hardy presents a fairly consistent reading of modern man's situation. By ordering the diverse impressions that appear throughout the poetry, we can reconstruct Hardy's understanding of modern man's condition as follows. Because man senses that God has disappeared from the world, he tries to reestablish contact with God. He soon finds out, however, that God has died. In view of His death and the subsequent impossibility of His Providential ordering of the universe, man is awakened to the cosmic absurdity of his existence. The absurd world is the modern world, and in this forlorn domain, modern man seeks order, peace, and understanding of his condition. Stripped of his delusions about his meaning and his consoling hopes for eternal existence, man is left with his enervating consciousness to contemplate his meaningless existence and to face up to the prospect of a life without ultimate hope. With somewhat of a humanistic leap of faith, Hardy suggests that mutual dependence and loving-kindness may provide a basis for man's life on earth, but that possibility is generally undercut by man's cruelty to his fellow men. In Jude the Obscure, which is

in some ways Hardy's most pessimistic work, modern man is seen abandoned by both God and man, and deprived of faith, hope, and love.

This chapter will reconstruct the development of Hardy's thought, beginning with man's initial perception of God's remoteness and continuing through his actual confrontation of the God-less universe. The effects and implications of God's death will be considered in subsequent chapters.

Thomas Hardy, who called himself a harmless agnostic, experienced the absence of God early in his life. Webster suggests the time of Hardy's loss of orthodox faith as 1865.²

From his reading of Darwin and the Essayists he had already concluded that God probably does not exist, and that, if he does exist, he does not care for the happiness of insignificant man.³

It seems that in departing from the world, God has effectively covered his tracks, leaving man the terrible responsibility of discovering or creating his own paths to his own goals.

There are some preliminary obstacles to dealing with Hardy's God that ought to be removed immediately. First of all, though Hardy could not conceive of a personal God,

God is personified in the poetry. The dramatization of God's disappearance and death serves to provide meaningful and appropriate metaphors for the significant religious experiences that occur in the poetic works. Hardy actually writes about God's death and funeral in "The Problem" and "God's Funeral." More importantly, the disappearance and death of God symbolize man's sense of abandonment and frustration over his inability to experience satisfaction for the profound spiritual and psychological needs he has developed. The reasoning is that since God no longer fulfills man's needs, He must have departed from man's planet and forgotten him, or else He has died. We are to consider these two events, then, as dramatic metaphors or symbols that refer not only to historical events but suggest weighty implications relevant to the events.

Another problem in discussing Hardy's God is the inconsistency in naming and characterizing. God may be called Doom, World-weaver, Lord Most High, Willer, Might, Immanent Doer, even simply God. Also, God may be masculine, feminine, or It. In some poems, the forces that control life are personified as Time and Chance, or Doom and She, to mention just two possibilities. However named, though, Hardy's God will be comprehensible to us

if we are willing to lay aside certain orthodox associations that have attached to the word God. For dramatic purposes in the poems, God is personified; but we are not to equate Hardy's God with, for example, the Christian concept of God the Father, benevolent but just. As we shall see, these latter qualities are totally irrelevant in Hardy's characterization of the Immanent Doer.

We can turn now to the poetry, prepared as we are to avoid much of the usual confusion. In many of the poems that assume the existence of God, Hardy conveys the sense of God's remoteness from man. In "Doom and She," God is conceived of as "a mighty pair-- / Slow, statuesque, intense--" which dwells "Amid the vague Immense."⁴ In "The Bullfinches," Mother is "Busy in her handsome house / Known as Space" (Poems, 111). In "The God-Forgotten," an emissary of the sons of Earth "Towered far, and lo!" he appeared before God. The Creator regrets that man has sundered himself from God, for "All other orbs have kept in touch" (Poems, 112-13). The separation of God from man, the "Maker and the made," is vividly concretized by "this dead wall" that lies "Between Thyself and me" in the monologue of "The Bedridden Peasant: To an Unknowing God" (Poems, 113-14). Finally, in "The Blow," God is "the Inscrutable, the Rid" (Poems, 449).⁵

Hardy is aware of man's profound need for God, his willingness to look everywhere to find Him and reestablish communication with Him. God is "That Which some enthrona, / And for whose meaning myriads grope" (Poems, 449). Man's failure to find God suggests that if He continues to exist, it is in some transcendent realm far removed from earth.

Furthermore, if man is to know God, it can only be through his interpretation of God's acts and their effects in the world of men. It was becoming increasingly obvious in the Victorian age that God was not omnipotent, as men had always thought. To John Stuart Mill, the very scheme of nature appeared as a designedly imperfect work of God. Matthew Arnold's Empedocles asserts that God's powers are limited when he says the "o'erlabour'd Power"

Hath toil perpetually
And travails, pants, and moans;
Pain would do all things well, but sometimes
fails in strength.⁶

Empedocles later chastises man for his foolishness in believing that God is all-knowing. The fact that man's knowledge is limited is no proof, according to Empedocles, that God's is infinite. By the same reasoning, man's perpetual weariness does not prove that God enjoys eternal rest (PW, 424).

To Hardy, who believed in the permanence of evolutionary change, the idea that God is not all-powerful necessarily follows. Since the universe is always undergoing change, the Immanent Will, which is God, is also always changing. As a result of this constant process, one of the unconscious, perhaps even undesired consequences of the Immanent Will's dialectic, is its inability to change what it has done or turn back time. In "By the Earth's Corpse," God admits that

No God can cancel deeds foredone,
Or [Time's] old coils unwind! (Poems, 114-15)

Man's recognition that God is not all-powerful leads him to further discoveries about his creator. Slowly, unwillingly, but inevitably and painfully, man begins to realize that God seems to act purely arbitrarily, with no concern for man's existence. God is simply indifferent; and though this indifference often appears to be malevolence, "Hap" makes it very clear that there is no evil intention on the part of the "purblind Doomsters." Crass Casualty and dicing Time "had as readily strown / Bliss as about my pilgrimage as pain" (Poems, 7)

The frustration and outrage expressed by "Hap" are peculiarly modern emotions, which arise from a man's honest effort to explain the existence of evil in the

world.? Of course Hardy was not the first to confront this problem; the entire history of Christian apologetics may be said to have evolved from this concern. But Hardy's modernness is seen in his facing the consequences of the empirical facts without trying to explain and justify God's hidden ways, without positing a divine order where there seems to be disorder, without calling arbitrariness divine justice. For Hardy, there is no eschatological solution to life's daily suffering. The religious consolations are, at best, beside the point.

In many of the poems, the narrators feel a desperate longing for God's comforting care. Though they are pathetically unwilling to accept the fact that God is indifferent to them, Hardy makes it clear that God acts without regard for man's well-being.

The divine pair Doom and She symbolize the indifferent, unconscious nature of their universe. She, the "Mother of all things made," is "Matchless in artistry," but "Unlit with sight is she. --" Doom, "her ever well-obeyed," is "vacant of feeling" for man (Poems, 108). The purposelessness and indifference of God's actions are further revealed in "New Year's Eve," when God explains that "Sense-sealed I have wrought." After this explanation, He goes back to work.

He sank to raptness as of yore,
 And opening New Year's Day
 Wove it by rote as theretofore,
 And went on working evermore
 In his unwavering way. (Poems, 260-1)⁶

Finally, man finds that the greatest indignity he suffers, death, is likewise an indifferent event to God. Constantly living under the tyrant Death, man asks God's meaning in "crowning Death the King of the Firmament." Dispassionately, It replies "I'd no meaning, that I knew, / In crowning Death as King" (Poems, 724-5).

The Creator's lack of concern for his creatures is nowhere so obvious as when He forgets and abandons them right after their creation. To the petitioner from Earth, who has come for some response to man's cries, God responds:

"The Earth, sayest thou? The Human race?
 By Me created? Sad its lot?
 Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:
 Such world I fashioned not." - (Poems, 112)

The Bedridden Peasant contrasts God's inhuman behavior to his creatures with that of a person who, after putting a child to nurse, looks after the child, seeking its welfare and mourning its misfortune.

But Thou, Lord, giv'st us men our day
 In helpless bondage thus
 To Time and Chance, and seem'st straightway
 To think no more of us! (Poems, 113)

The Bullfinches, in the poem so titled, reflect on Nature's similar neglect of them:

All we creatures, high and far
(said they there), the Mother's are;
Yet she never shows endeavor
To protect from warring wild
Bird or beast she calls her child. (Poems 111)

For Hardy, God is not merely unfeeling and indifferent to man's suffering. Though these characteristics explain in part man's feeling of alienation from God and contribute to man's inability to relate to Him, the most important cause of the separation of creature from creator is God's moral unconsciousness. His outright indifference to man's plight results from His unawareness of moral values. Man loves and hates, suffers and enjoys, but to God all of these experiences are equal-- and indifferent. God's amorality is evident in "Doom and She," where the two cooperate in the eternal creation and destruction of life. Sightless She, who works by touch alone, hears man's "multitudinous moan" and suspects that she "had schemed a world of strife." Doom's reply reflects God's moral unconsciousness.

VI

"World-weaver," he replies,
"I scan all thy domain;
But since nor joy nor pain
It lies in me to recognize,
Thy questionings are vain.

VII

"World-weaver! what is Grief?
 And what are Right, and Wrong,
 And Feeling, that belong
 To Creatures all who owe thee grief?
 Why is Weak worse than Strong?"

The question of the morality of an act is never a consideration for God. Morality may be a meaningful concept to humans, but it is an irrelevant one for the deity. Time and Death, therefore, are introduced into life for apparently no reason, no moral purpose. God had no meaning in crowning Death as King of the Firmament. Nor was there any purpose for his stealing the "light away / That haunted in her eye." He did not intend to hoard those sweets he stole. "O no, / They charm not me; I bid Time throw / Them carelessly away" (Poems, 261-2).

Now Hardy is not the only Victorian poet who writes of God's amorality and indifference towards man. During this whole period intellectuals were reassessing their understanding of God and trying to redefine their relation to Him. Orthodox thinking was subjected to intense scrutiny and fundamentalist beliefs were discredited by man's application of his new scientific knowledge to question "facts" that were previously accepted as revealed truths. Matthew Arnold, another Victorian poet who experienced God's disappearance from the world in modern times, has

characterized God in some poems using strikingly similar language to that employed by Hardy.⁹ "Mycerinus," for example, an early work of Arnold's is, in part, a young King's soliloquy concerning the indifference and injustice of "The Powers of Destiny." Condemned to "an unjust close" after a life dedicated to justice, Mycerinus questions the Powers' indifference to his sacrifices.

'Seems it so light a thing, then, austere
Powers,
To spurn man's common lure, life's pleasant
things?
Seems there no joy in dances crowned with
flowers,
Love, free to range, and regal banquetings?
Bend ye on these, indeed, an unmoved eye,
Not Gods but ghosts, in frozen apathy? (PW, 10)

Indignant when the Gods apparently disregard his virtue, yet sincerely concerned to know why they have, Mycerinus even questions their supposed omnipotence.

'Or is it that some Force, too wise, too
strong,
Even for yourselves to conquer or beguile,
Sweeps earth, and heaven, and men, and gods
along.
Like the broad volume of the insurgent Nile?
And the great powers we serve, themselves
may be
Slaves of a tyrannous necessity? (PW, 10-11)¹⁰

Mycerinus' consternation indicates his alienation from the Gods he so honored. In the following stanza he reveals his

inability to locate the inaccessible Powers.

'Or in mid-heaven, perhaps, your golden
 sun,
 Where earthly voice climbs never, wing their
 flight,
 And in wild hunt, through mazy tracts of stars,
 Sweep in the sounding stillness of the night?
 Or in deaf ease, on thrones of dazzling sheen,
 Drinking deep draughts of joy, ye dwell serene?

The uncertain questioning, the fanciful speculation, the desperate probing are all ineffectual. The Gods remain hidden and, in their remoteness, indifferent to man.

Lost labour! when the circumambient gloom
 But hides, if Gods, Gods careless of our doom?

The idea of an indifferent, unconscious God, then, was not unknown at the time Hardy was writing. Given such a God, man could only hope that He would develop consciousness and recognize the suffering He causes. Such a hope was conceivable for Hardy, who understood and accepted the Darwinian theory of evolution. For belief that God, the Immanent Will of the universe, is always changing certainly accords with evolutionary theory.¹¹ Perhaps God, who has previously acted by rote, without vision and feeling, creating pain and suffering for man, will become aware of these mistakes (for so they are in man's mind) and attempt to rectify them. Such is man's

hope, as expressed in "The Sleep-Worker."

Should that morn come, and show thy opened eyes
All that Life's palpitating tissues feel,
How wilt thou bear thyself in thy surprise?-

Wilt thou destroy, in one wild shock of shame,
Thy whole high heaving firmamental frame,
Or patiently adjust, amend, and heal? (Poems,
110-11)

That God may already be about redressing His wrongs is suggested in two poems. First, in "Doom and She," the very fact that She is concerned over man's condition "Upon Earth's bounded bord" and is willing to consider undoing what she has wrought by touch alone indicates a developing moral awareness in God. She comprehends, however vaguely, that man's moans and groans in his "world of strife" might require comforting. Her sympathy for men is implied rather than directly stated, though:

--Some say they have heard her sighs
On alpine height or Polar peak
When the night tempests rise. (Poems, 109)

In the second poem, "ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩΝ ΘΕΩΝ," the speaker seems to perceive an increased awareness in the heretofore unknowing God. Through the eternal process of change, God may be developing a consciousness similar to man's own,

Perhaps Thy ancient rote-restricted ways
 Thy ripening rule transcends;
 That listless effort tends
 To grow perciplient with advance of days,
 And with percipience bends.

The evidence for such a hope appears in "unwonted pur-
 lieus, far and nigh, / At whiles or short or long," where
 "May be discerned a wrong / Dying as of self-slaughter"
 (Poems, 172).

God finally does achieve consciousness, but this development occurs in "By the Earth's Corpse," after the destruction of Earth and Mankind. Hardy's irony here verges on the "noble grotesque,"¹² for even though God is conscious of his wrongs and repents of them, he can no longer benefit humanity. Speaking to Time, God admits his sorrow for having allowed man to suffer so long. Though Time suggests that things are once again the same, God replies, "Things now are not the same / As they have earlier been.

"Written indelibly
 On my eternal mind
 Are all the wrongs endured
 By Earth's poor patient kind,
 Which my too oft unconscious hand
 Let enter undesigned.
 No God can cancel deeds foredone,
 Or thy old coils unwind! (Poems, 114-15)

Since for Hardy morality depends on consciousness,

and God is unconscious or less conscious than man, man is morally superior to God. This becomes obvious in "The Blow," where the man who suffers receives some comfort from the thought that it was God, not another man, who struck him down. For

...it would augur works and ways
Below the lowest man avays
To have hurled that stone
Into the sunshine of our days. (Poems, 449)

Unlike man, the Immanent Doer acts without aim. It bestows injuries at random; and man can only find consolation in hoping that It will recognize Its mistakes and learn to grieve for them.

For a long time God worked "Sense-sealed ... without a guess / That [He] evolved a Consciousness / To ask for reasons why." It is paradoxical that consciousness emerged in man before it did in God, since all change results from the nature of God, the Immanent Will of the universe. It is man's consciousness that leads him to criticize his less conscious maker. God, in turn, is puzzled by man's complaints.

"Strange that ephemeral creatures who
By my own ordering are,
Should see the shortness of my view,
Use ethin tests I never knew,
Or made provisions for!" (Poems, 261)

It is further paradoxical that man should be God's ethical teacher, but this is precisely the case in "God's Education." The God that steals the light that "haunted in her eye," her "lily tints and rose; / All her young sprightliness of soul," bids Time to throw them carelessly away.

... "We call that cruelty --
We, your poor mortal kind."
He mused. "The thought is new to me.
Forsooth, though I men's master be,
There is the teaching mind!" (Poems, 261-2)

That man is morally superior to the unconscious, irresponsible, indifferent Powers is little consolation for the permanent suffering he experiences. Regardless of his superiority and his tendency to "sneer, rail, blaspheme ... / Not one grief-groan or pleasure-gleam / Will you increase or take away."¹³

"Why things are thus whoso desires,
May well remain my secret still.../
A fourth dimension, say the guides,/br/>To matter is conceivable,/br/>Think some such mystery resides/
Within the ethic of my will. (Poems, 245)

For those, then, who have experienced the disappearance of God and His unconscious, indifferent treatment, existence remains painfully blighted. Man can only hope for amendment and redress of his condition when and if

the limited God becomes aware of his errors and has the power to correct them.

There is a second way of experiencing the absence of God in the nineteenth century. For some men, God has not merely disappeared. He has actually died. The evidence for God's death is first suggested indirectly in "Mute Opinion," where the spokesmen of society speak out their optimistic "purpose and opinion / Through pulpit, press, and song." These hopeful advocates "That stirred the heat and hum" are contrasted with "A large-eyed few, and dumb," who thought not as the others did. The history of the world, however, worked itself out

Not as the loud had spoken,
But as the mute had thought. (Poems, 115-16)

The optimism of churchmen is usually founded on the existence of God and trust in his justice; but the actual course of events might well imply, among other things, that there is no God at all.

More obvious indications of God's dying appear in "Nature's Questioning," where her chastened children sit cowed, "Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn." Finally, with lips alone stirring, they "wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!" Perhaps some Vast Imbecility framed them in jest, or they were made by some Auto-

man is unconscious of their pains. More to the point, they ask "Or are we live remains / Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?" (Poems, 589).

Everywhere there is evidence of God's expiration.

Here and there the watch-towers knell it
With a sullen significance,
Heard of the few who hearken intently and carry
an eagerly unstrained sense. (Poems, 109)

For those who "believe the evidence," hope for divine redress of the human condition is impossible, and man's moral superiority to God has not yet prepared him to learn to live without Him. The problem that emerges in the poem entitled "The Problem" is "Shall we conceal the ~~case~~, or tell it --?" To let the old view reign is to leave undisturbed the peace and comfort of the happiest men, who do not credit the signs. "Note not the pigment so long as the painting determines humanity's joy and pain" (Poems, 109).

Inevitably, though, the truth will be told and man must confront it. The dying God addresses "A Plaint to Man" and asserts that "The truth should be told, and the fact be faced / That had best been faced in earlier years." Once God starts relating the facts, the old views are quickly undercut. In accounting for the emergence of man, God affirms the Darwinian theory of evolution.

Much more startling is His assertion that man is God's creator, not the reverse.

My virtue, power, utility,
Within my maker must all abide,
Since none in myself can ever be,

One thin as a phasm on a lantern-shade
Shown forth in the dark upon some dim sheet,
And by none but its showman vivified. (Poems, 306)

God's revelation that man created Him in his own image serves two purposes. The first is to strip man of his delusions and bring him to relinquish his useless visions. Whether man experiences either the death or the disappearance of God, he learns that God is no longer useful to him, no longer meaningful in his experience. In tearing away man's veil of ignorance, Hardy's God reminds us of Arnold's Empedocles, who decries man's "peopling the void air" and believing "that the world were full of Gods we cannot see" (PW, 421). "Harsh Gods and hostile Fates / Are dreams! this only is --" i.e., the fact of man's unity with all things, including God.

All things the world which fill
Of but one stuff are spun,
That we who rail are still,
With what we rail at, one, ... (PW, 422)

But Hardy goes further in having God reveal man as His creator. In doing so, he suggests very subtly one

source of the greatness of man -- his ability to create and sustain symbols that adequately represent his most profound hopes and needs. In his first despair man created God for "easing a loaded heart" and soothing the irk of this wailful world. Now, man finds God dwindling day by day

Beneath the deicide eyes of mirth
 In a light that will not let me stay, ...
 And tomorrow the whole of me disappears,
 (Poems, 306)

That man could create and then kill God is, paradoxically, a measure of man's greatness. But, in outgrowing God, so to speak, man must create a new symbol, must find a new source of meaning to replace God. Another important humanist, Friedrich Nietzsche, has articulated the frightening paradox more directly than Hardy. Nietzsche's madman in "The Gay Science" (1882) cries out:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us -- for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.¹⁴

Nietzsche is aware that a new order must be established to replace God's order, and he calls for a religion of man, so to speak. Being the profound psychologist he is, Nietzsche sees the need for man to create new ceremonies, rituals, symbols to represent in concrete form man's new goals. The realization of Nietzsche's humanistic order will be achieved when man looks back upon the murder of God as a new and glorious starting point in his history.

Man's murder of God is the point of departure for Hardy's humanistic speculation too, though he is not nearly as exuberant or optimistic as Nietzsche. We shall consider Hardy's humanism shortly, but now we must turn to his sensitivity to and his artistic representation of the implications of God's death. In short, the two most important consequences are the decline in religion in the West and the displacement of God as the ultimate source of ethical meaning by the individual self. These developments will be considered in the following chapters.

NOTES

1. J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God, Five Nineteenth Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 2.
2. H. C. Webster, On a Darkling Plain: The Art and Thought of Thomas Hardy (Chicago, 1947), pp. 47-8.
3. Webster, p. 49.
4. Thomas Hardy, "Doom and She," in The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1925), p. 108.
All quotations from the poetry will be taken from this edition and will be indicated in the text as (Poems, p.).
5. Hardy's God, in "The Blow," characterized as "the Hid," must not be confused with the Christian concept of the hidden God. For the Christians, God is immanent as well as transcendent. We have difficulty locating Him because He hides Himself, for example, in the humanity of Jesus Christ or in the Eucharist. But Hardy's inscrutable, hidden God is not immanent. Man cannot find Him because He is not in the world; if He exists at all, it is in some transcendent realm beyond the earth, beyond man's reach.
6. Matthew Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna" in The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, eds. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (London, New York, Toronto, 1950), p. 422.
All subsequent quotations from Arnold's poetry will be taken from this edition and will be indicated in the text as (PW, p.).
7. "Hap" was written in 1866. Hardy developed some of his modern insights very early. See also his notebook entry for May, 1865: "The world does not despise us; it only neglects us."

8. See "ΑΡΝΩΣΤΗ ΘΕΩ," in Poems, 171-2, for another reference to God's working by rote.

9. Matthew Arnold entered into the theological discussion of his times, interestingly enough in support of established religion. In his prose writings, Arnold attempted to buttress dogma and re-inspirit the Bible by insisting on its poetical truthfulness and securing its traditional authority. In his public role as social critic and spokesman for culture, Arnold projected a considerably different image from the isolated, alienated individual who appears in many of the poems, questioning the nature of God and the traditional bases of faith. Like Hardy, Arnold felt it was safer to raise certain kinds of questions in poetry than in prose, one reason being that few people read poetry. It was Arnold's public, prose writings that Hardy attacked when, in 1888, he reacted to the "besetting sin of modern literature," its insincerity, with a critique of Arnold's works in morals and religion: "When dogma has to be balanced on its feet by such hair-splitting as the late Mr. M. Arnold's it must be in a very bad way" (Life, 215). It appears that Hardy misunderstood what Arnold was trying to do in reinterpreting the Bible. Arnold felt that the teachings of the Bible are valid for modern man only if he will give up his fundamentalist attitudes and value the ethical teachings of Scripture as poetry. It is in this sense that Arnold conceives of poetry as a replacement for static, rigid religion. Surely this conception should not have been inimical to Hardy, who wrote in the "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier:

In any event poetry, pure literature in general, religion-- I include religion, in its essential and undogmatic sense, because poetry and religion touch each other, or rather modulate into each other; are, indeed, often but different names for the same thing-- these, I say, the visible signs of mental and emotional life, must like all other things keep moving, becoming; even though at present, when belief in witches of Endor is displacing the Darwinian theory and "the truth that shall make you free," men's minds appear, as above noted, to be moving backwards rather than on!

Like Arnold, Hardy saw the need to replace the untenable religious beliefs of Christianity. In a letter to Dr. Arnaldo Cervesato, he expresses doubt about "any permanent revival of the old transcendental ideals; but I think there may gradually be developed an Idealism of Fancy; that is, an idealism in which fancy is no longer tricked out and made to masquerade as belief, but is frankly and honestly accepted as an imaginative solace in the lack of any substantial solace to be found in life" (Life, 310).

10. See Hardy's "The Subalterns" (Poems, 110), in which he suggests that the great powers we serve actually are slaves to a "force on high."
11. Hardy applies evolutionary theory to explain God's development of consciousness. The ideas of the evolutionists, which seemed so negative and destructive to those who clung to the Bible literally, are transformed temporarily into a consoling hope for mankind by Hardy.
12. John Ruskin, in the "Grotesque Renaissance" section of The Stones of Venice, discusses how "the mind, under certain phases of excitement, plays with terror, and summons images which, if it were in another temper, would be awful, but of which, either in weariness or in irony, it refrains for the time to acknowledge the true terribleness. And the mode in which this refusal takes place distinguishes the noble from the ignoble grotesque. For the master of the noble grotesque knows the depth of all at which he seems to mock, and would feel it at another time, or feels it in a certain undercurrent of thought even while he jests with it. . . ."

This passage is reprinted in The Genius of John Ruskin, ed. J. D. Rosenberg (Boston, 1963), p. 210.

13. In view of the permanently mysterious actions of God, Hardy's "melliorist" hopes are meaningfully understood only in relation to man's ability, through his conscious awareness of his situation, to change and control those parts of the universe which are products of his consciousness (i.e., society) even if he cannot overcome or change for the present the unconscious portions of the universe or the unconscious (i.e., emotional) parts of himself. See Webster, p. 195.

14. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," reprinted in
Walter Kaufmann, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to
Sartre (Cleveland and New York, 1954), p.105.

CHAPTER II

Ever since the thinkers of the Enlightenment conceived of God as a watchmaker who retreated from the world after creating it and setting it to work, God has seemed more and more remote from man's experience. Nineteenth century man's experience of the disappearance of God is translated by the slogan "God is dead" in the mid 1960's. Far from being an original contemporary insight, the announcement of God's death represents the culmination of modern society's encounter with the Void.

The decline of religion, what William Barrett calls the central fact of modern history in the West,¹ is unquestionably the result of man's losing touch with God. In modern times the decline is evidenced simply by the fact that religion is no longer the uncontested center and ruler of man's life and that the Church is no longer the ultimate and unquestioned asylum of his being. The sacramental and ritualistic practices that sanctified Christian man's life from birth to death are no longer relevant to the modern, post-Christian man, and the whole system of religious symbols is being effaced from the landscape.

Hardy's final novel, Jude the Obscure, illustrates quite clearly the decay and degradation that mark the decline of religion in modern times. The secularization of the Western world is rapidly being effected, and many of the external symbols of the former religious-oriented culture are being torn down or have fallen into disrepair or decay. Regardless of the gradual replacement of religious goals and values by worldly ones, though, established religion continues to exist, endorsing a degrading ideal of self-denial. Its pernicious ethical rigidity, as Hardy sees it, is no longer Christian, humane, nor psychologically justifiable.

In the opening chapter, when Hardy is recounting the recent changes that have stripped Marygreen of its important historical and cultural landmarks, he especially emphasizes the razing of the local church and the profane uses to which the formerly consecrated building materials are put. The predominance of secular goals and needs in modern society is symbolically suggested by the efficient reuse of the church's stones and timber.

Above all, the original church, hump-backed, wood-turreted, and quaintly hipped, had been taken down, and either cracked up into heaps of road-metal in the lane, or utilized as pig-sty walls, garden seats, guard-stones to fences, and rockeries in the flower-beds of the neighbourhood. (Jude, 6)

The town of Shaston undergoes similar changes which reflect the modern supplantation of religious functions by secular ones. As in the case of Marygreen, the shift in functions is imaged forth in terms of the transformation of the landscape and its associations. The ancient British Palladour, whose magnificent apsidal Abbey was the chief glory of South Wessex, is no longer famed as a religious retreat. With the destruction of the enormous abbey, the whole place collapsed in a general ruin. The former burial place for bishops and saints, the repository of King Edward the Martyr's bones, is now, through a modern peculiarity, the resting-place of traveling circuses and other itinerant concerns whose business lay largely at fairs and markets (Jude, 241).

Even Christminster, "the most Christian city in the country," shows signs of the demise of religion. Sue Bridehead, in her early anti-Christian stage, recognizes the modern shift from religious to worldly concerns in that seat of established religion, and she delights in reviling the medievalism of the fetishistic ghost-seers at Christminster. She tells Jude that the railway station, a product of modern times, is now the center of town life, not the cathedral (Jude, 160).

Though Jude, at the time of his first entrance into

Christminster, did not see "that mediævalism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal," and that Gothic architecture and its associations had no place in the world shaping itself at the time (Jude, 98-9), one of his rustic neighbors noticed the "auld crumbling buildings, half church, half almshouse, and not much going on at that" (Jude, 133). The imagery of decay and inactivity, suggestive of death, recurs throughout the novel in relation to Christminster, the novel's major symbol for conventional religion. Ironically, Jude is often employed in shoring up or restoring the crumbling buildings of the university. His work parallels his attempts to sustain the Christian ideal of self-denial in his own life. Later, Jude's failure to find a philosophical basis for his life in Christianity is attested by his break with both Christminster and the Church. After puzzling his way through his Tractarian stage, as Sue sarcastically expressed it, Jude gives up all ecclesiastical work to take up a secular trade. He feels that further church-restoring, with its connections to traditional religion and conduct, would be hypocritical in view of his present practice, as "hardly a shred of the beliefs with which he had first gone up to Christminster now [remained] with him" (Jude, 373). In effect, he permits the

university to crumble and fall with the dead ideas for which it stood.

Jude's renunciation of religious aspirations and employments for worldly ones follows a general pattern established by Phillotson and the hymn-writer. In many respects Phillotson's career foreshadows Jude's own,² though the nature of the two men's renunciations and worldly failures differs vastly. Jude's surprise and disappointment at Phillotson's inability to progress in the religious life are mild in comparison to the disillusionment he feels after visiting the composer of the moving hymn "The Foot of the Cross." At the time of their meeting, Jude was "a hungry soul in pursuit of a full soul!"

Perplexed and harassed as he himself was about Sue and Arabella, and troubled as was his conscience by the complication of his position, how he would like to know that man! 'He of all men would understand my difficulties,' said the impulsive Jude. If there were any person in the world to choose as a confidant, this composer would be the one, for he must have suffered, and throbbed, and yearned. (Jude, 232-33)

Yet the writer of the supremely beautiful hymn is entirely unresponsive to Jude's needs. He has his own problem, that of finding a marketable product. His

gift for hymn-writing is wasted, an anachronism in a world that is no longer God's temple but man's market-place. He is therefore abandoning his sacred music to become a wine merchant, for "You must go into trade if you want to make money nowadays" (Jude, 234).

Early in the novel, the effacement of religious symbols from the land and the world's general movement from sacred to secular concerns have little effect on Jude. Despite the demolition of the original church at Marygreen and its replacement by "a tall new building of modern Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes," Jude remains rooted in the ancient cultural and religious tradition. Living in the home of his great-aunt Drusilla, "one of the few old houses left," he retains contact with a traditional way of life that combines both Christian and pagan elements.

But when Jude departs for Christminster, he separates himself from his native station to seek intellectual development in the modern world. His youthful attachment to the external symbols of Christianity persists even after he uproots himself to realize his university dreams. Affected by the "modern vice of unrest," Jude would gaze at the spire of the Cathedral, the tall tower, belfry, windows, and pinnacles of the college.

"These objects he used as stimulants when his faith in the future was dim" (Jude, 101). Also, he grew "reverent and abstracted" when regarding the devotional paintings of the Virgin, Saints, and Holy Family at Wardour Castle (Jude, 163).

Now Hardy was fully aware of the psychological value of religious symbols and imagery. In reminding man of his eternal destiny and supporting his hope in temporal adversity, the whole system of symbolical ceremonies and religious art provided a concrete link between man and God. For a long time, Jude's Christianity is supported by his attachment to the emotional and aesthetic rather than the doctrinal elements of that tradition. Also, Arabella finds some temporary consolation after her second husband's death by making pilgrimages to visit chapels and sing spiritual songs. Finally, Sue's "conversion" is undertaken in response to what she considers God's call for expiation of her sinfulness in violating her marriage to Phillotson and living with Jude. To her distraught mind, the deaths of her children and Little Father Time appear to be signs of God's will. However, in imaging the physical decay and the elimination of religious symbols, Hardy indicates that the symbols no longer function as they should. With the gradual disappearance of the symbols, man is losing his visible connections with God.

Throughout the novel, Christianity and its symbolic matrix come to be seen as a repressive force opposed to man's natural need and desire for personal expression.³ Religion degenerates from a psychological system that functions to insure man's eternal salvation into an inflexible legal code that stifles man's individuality. This degeneration is represented in terms of the failure of religious symbols to perform their accustomed tasks. Christminster, the central symbol of established religion in England, time and again prohibits Jude from realizing his Christian aspirations. The fearfully massive walls that shut Jude out serve to perpetuate Christian England's unequal, un-Christian class structure. Finally, as the repository for outdated ethical and theological doctrines, Christminster has truly degenerated into a home for lost causes.

Jude's eventual separation from Christianity comes about because of his inability and unwillingness to practice the rigid self-denial demanded by religious law. At the time of his break with the Church, religious symbols and observances have taken on an entirely new meaning for him. His apostasy culminates in his disgust over Sue's "mysticism, or Sacerdotalism ... if it's that which has caused this deterioration in you.... I am glad

I had nothing to do with Divinity -- damn glad -- if it's going to ruin you in this way!" (Jude, 423). Even Arabella's spurious Christianity is quickly shed when it comes into conflict with her desire to have Jude again, only six weeks after her second husband's death. Her religious practices divert her only temporarily from her more authentic, more urgent needs. Arabella simply cannot and will not neglect the call of her emotions. "Feelings are feelings! I won't be a creeping hypocrite any longer -- so there!" She discards her religious tracts and hymnals, which have proved unsatisfactory deterrents against evil actions. "I've tried that sort o' physic and have failed wi' it. I must be as I was born!" (Jude, 381).

The traditional religious symbols, as we have seen, can no longer sustain man psychologically, with the result that the symbols and the tradition they represent are being displaced and devalued in the modern world. Because man is losing his symbolic connection with the transcendent realm, he must find another source of ethical authority. Furthermore, that source must be located in the world, not "out there" with God.

It is made clear in Jude that man must finally become his own authority for his actions. To put it

very simply, ethical meaning derives from the individual self. Both Jude and Arabella consistently respond to an unspecified "Nature,"⁴ which is evidently the norm of some more genuine and personal ethical mode than its opposite, "Civilization," identified with social law, convention, and in the last analysis the moral and intellectual constraints of Christianity.⁵ Hardy's narrator in the novel makes this conflict clear when he says of Jude: "He might fast and pray during the whole interval, but the human was more powerful in him than the Divine" (Jude, 248). Jude acknowledges as much in one of the major recognition scenes in the novel. After he gave Sue the fateful kiss that marked the turning point in his resolve to become a minister, he reflects that he "was as unfit, obviously, by nature, as he had been by social position, to fill the part of propounder of accredited dogma" (Jude, 261). As both his aspirations, the one towards academical proficiency and the other towards apostleship, were checked by a woman, he questions whether it is "that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress?" (Jude, 261).

When Sue Bridehead, on the other hand, achieves a masochistic martyrdom in her penitential remarriage with Phillotson, we become sickeningly aware of the human degradation that established religion can foster. In no instance is the novel's motto, "The Letter Killeth," so appropriate as when Sue atones for her sinfulness with Jude by allowing Phillotson to make love to her. Though she is so repelled by him that she earlier jumped out of a second-floor window to avoid his touch, Sue feels compelled to consummate her union with Phillotson in order to redeem her soul in God's eyes!

The harmful rigidity of the law, one of Hardy's major themes in Jude, is responsible for the perversion of natural relationships. The most obvious case is the marriage between Jude and Sue. Though they love each other and want to live together as man and wife, they fear that, like their ancestors, they are not the kind of people who should marry. Both are too sensitive, too thin-skinned. Descendants of a family for "whom domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneity," they fear to "come together for the most preposterous of all joint ventures for them-- matrimony" (Jude, 344-345). Moreover, the legal contract, Sue fears, introduces dominance on the part of the male, whose

legal superiority in marriage encourages inequality in a relationship that should be founded on mutual respect. Sue is finally incapable of contracting to love Jude, though she is entirely able to make a total, voluntary marriage, one which Jude later calls "Nature's own marriage ... unquestionably!" (Jude, 423).

On the other hand, the law, according to Sue's literal interpretation, insists on the lifelong permanence of Jude's and Sue's first marriages, regardless of Jude's intellectual incompatibility with Arabella and Sue's physical repulsion by Phillotson. The fact that Jude is tricked into marrying Arabella after being seduced by her is, in view of the contract, irrelevant.⁶ Her use of civilized, though unnatural, lures such as false dimples, a detachable hair-piece, and half-truths about her history underscores the unsatisfactory and perverse nature of the marriage. Yet, when the couple is remarried, under conditions at least as sordid and degrading to Jude as at the first marriage, the clergyman congratulates the pair for doing "the right and proper thing" (Jude, 463).⁷ Jude, who would do anything to save a woman's honor, laughs bitterly and announces, "It is true religion! Ha - ha - ha!"

The degradation of Christian morality into "the

right and proper thing" to do is emblematic of society's translation of the Christian commandments into abstractions. The terrible misconception upon which such a translation is based is the belief that all men are essentially alike. Thus, Gillingham can advise Phillotson not to let Sue go to Jude, that she will get over her physical fastidiousness, and until she does Phillotson will have to put up with a few whims. To Gillingham, Sue's behavior is not unusual, her strange Shelleyan ideas only whims, though dangerous ones that should be extirpated. Without considering fully the individual personality of Sue Bridehead or the broad ethical dimensions of Phillotson's decision, Gillingham objects: "But you see, there's the question of neighbours and society-- what will happen if everybody--" (Jude, 277), and "It will upset all received opinion hereabout. Good God-- what will Shaston say!" (Jude, 279). When Phillotson departs from Gillingham's home, the bachelor-minister murmurs to himself the sure solution to all such domestic problems: "I think she ought to be smacked and brought to her senses-- that's what I think!" (Jude, 280).

Philotson is somewhat surprised at his friend's failure to adduce more telling arguments against his

decision to free Sue. It is to his credit that, in permitting Sue to leave him, Phillotson has not acted as though every person is alike in essence. His full and honest explanation to Gillingham of his marital situation clearly establishes his awareness of Sue's individuality. He admits that he has failed to understand Sue fully, and he is willing to reinterpret "received opinion" in the light of his particular experience (Jude, 275-9). Significantly, Phillotson decides "to act by instinct, and let principles take care of themselves. If a person who has blindly walked into a quagmire cries for help, I am inclined to give it, if possible" (Jude, 277). He continues, "Oh, I am not going to be a philosopher any longer! I only see what's under my eyes." A page later, he reiterates, "As I say, I am only a feeler, not a reasoner." Just as Jude and Arabella were seen above to respond to an instinctual, unspecified nature as opposed to the codified abstractions of civilization, so too does Phillotson. Later in the novel, Phillotson still insists that "I did only what was right, and just, and moral" in reply to Arabella, who told him he was decidedly wrong in allowing Sue to go to Jude (Jude, 382).

For Phillotson at this stage of the novel, every

person is existentially different. All efforts to understand an individual must take into account the peculiar history of that individual, for the sweeping rationalistic assumptions about the nature of man, such as Gillingham's superficial psychological theories, are inadequate and degrading. Phillotson emphasizes the importance of actual experience when he chastises Gillingham for calling his behavior puzzling and peculiar when he asks, "Have you ever stood before a woman whom you know to be intrinsically a good woman, while she has pleaded for release-- been the man she has knelt to and implored indulgence of?" Gillingham says he has not, to which Phillotson replies: "Then I don't think you are in a position to give an opinion. I have been that man, and it makes all the difference in the world, if one has any manliness or chivalry in him" (Jude, 278).

For Phillotson, then, existence precedes essence, to use an appropriate existential concept. Furthermore, throughout the novel this awareness or ethical vision that man's existence precedes and transcends the traditional definitions of man's essence constitutes the norm by which a character's behavior may be evaluated. As David DeLaura writes:

To commit oneself to life on the premises of a freer and more personal morality was also to accept the ache of modern dislocation, without the sustaining optimism of the older rationalists and without the illogical and dangerous anodynes of a compromising "received" piety and morality distilled from the discredited code of mysticism. This is the imperative bodied forth by Hardy, one of the most honest of doubters, in his "modern" novels, above all Tess and Jude.⁸

Hardy's modern characters, especially Jude Fawley, do not act with reference to a given and specific understanding of human nature, and they are not to be evaluated as if they did. Jude tells the Remembrance Day crowd, "I am in a chaos of principles -- groping in the dark-- acting by instinct and not after example" (Jude, 394). At some time or other, each of the three other main characters tries to be guided by what he considers indisputable personal fact, and somehow the reader is made to recognize and accept the authenticity of such behavior. For example, we acknowledge at the end of the novel that Jude Fawley is a good man regardless of his obvious human infirmities, that he is, in a special sense, a successful man in spite of his worldly failure.⁹ By the same token, we recognize that Phillotson's dishonest reasoning in deciding to take Sue back is a violation and perversion of his earlier natural feelings. Likewise, Sue's attempt to atone for what she has done

to believe her sinful marriage to Jude can also be seen as an instance of how the life of reason alienates man from his natural desires.¹⁰ In both of the latter cases, Phillotson and Sue reject or pervert personal fact and adopt the abstract, categorical behavior of objective types of people, namely the respectable civil servant and the repentant Christian sinner. They no longer prize the primacy of their individuality; rather, they think and act as all members of their categories are expected to do.

Much of the novel's ironic commentary, furthermore, is directed at those characters or institutions whose treatment of individuals assumes that everyone is alike. We sense, for example, the indignity of Gillingham's impersonal consideration of Sue, and the ultimate impotence of such demeaning treatment of a human being. We are expected to be appalled when Sue relinquishes her free individuality and objectifies herself, revealing her intrinsic conventionality. Finally, the novel condemns the rigidly structured society that classifies human beings and attempts to determine their lifelong station without regard to their individual worth.

Hardy rejects in toto such impersonal, objective treatment of human beings. Fundamentally, the authority

for his rejection comes from the valuable and primary personal experience of the individual man, living in a God-less universe. Because of the death of God, man is no longer assured of eternal judgment. The anachronistic Christian Church, which had long since degenerated into the primary repressor of individual freedom, no longer has the authority to discourage self-assertion and to require man to seek limited personal fulfillment on earth. Nor can it continue to sanction social classification. Man must exact every measure of peace, happiness, success, love, whatever he requires for self-fulfillment, here on earth during his limited lifetime. He is freed of the depersonalizing religious constraints, for, as Dostoevsky put it, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted." Hardy, whose thinking about freedom and personal liberty is closer to John Stuart Mill's than Dostoevsky's, would agree that, with some few qualifications, everything would be permitted.

In Hardy's works, though, man does not proceed directly from the perception of God's death to a realization of his own freedom. The course is much more painfully, agonizingly indirect. The following chapter will reconstruct the tortuous development of modern man's search for his freedom.

NOTES

1. William Barrett, Irrational Man (New York, 1962) p. 24.
2. The similarity in the two men's lives ceases when Phillotson chooses to regain respectability in and acceptance by society. Refer to Chapter IV for a complete discussion of the essential difference between the two men.
3. For the major characters of the novel, the essence of Christianity is the Christian ideal of self-denial. This is most movingly shown in Sue's conversion, when she abjures her every selfish act, her every fearless word. "Self-renunciation-- that's everything! I cannot humiliate myself too much" (Jude, 417). Earlier she proclaimed that "self-abnegation is the higher road," and that "We ought to be continually sacrificing ourselves on the altar of duty!" (Jude, 416).
4. Although Hardy never specifies what he means by Human Nature, he makes it clear that Human Nature is good enough in intentions and in potential, but goodness is not enough. Man lacks the careful, intelligent strength of will that would make his nature good in fact. Man takes life too easy, imagining that it is the kind of game where the players can afford to act like puppets and be contemptibly unaware. See Morrell, p. 166.
5. David DeLaura, "'The Ache of Modernism' in Hardy's Later Novels," ELH, XXXIV (Sept., 1967), 397.
6. Hardy's condemnation of Sue's literal interpretation of the law carries over to society's similarly rigid, literalistic adoption and enforcement of abstract codes. In stigmatizing offenders against the law with social ostracism, society effectively represses

man's natural search for individuality.

7. Not only is Jude's remarriage to Arabella sanctioned by the clergy, but even Sue's remarriage to Phillotson draws the approval of the local vicar, who says that the reunion will bring their lives to a triumphant and satisfactory issue. See Jude, p. 439.
8. DeLaura, p. 399.
9. At the Remembrance Day parade when Jude and Sue returned to Christminster, Sue tells Jude, "You struggled nobly to acquire knowledge, and only the meanest souls in the world would blame you" (Jude, 394). Later, when she is taking leave of Jude to return to Phillotson, Sue comments on the paradoxical nature of Jude's success: "Your worldly failure, if you have failed, is to your credit rather than to your blame. Remember that the greatest and best among mankind are those who do themselves no worldly good. Every successful man is more or less a selfish man. The devoted fail" (Jude, 437).
10. See Robert B. Heilman's "Introduction" to the Standard Edition of Jude the Obscure (New York, 1966), pp 41-45.

CHAPTER III

Because of the death of God in the modern world, modern man experiences a tremendous disruption in his existence. The ethical foundations of life are destroyed when God, the "man-projected Figure" who symbolizes "potency vast and loving-kindness strong" dies because man is no longer able to keep Him alive.

Uncompromising rude reality
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.
(Poems, 308)

The advancement of knowledge in the nineteenth century, which accelerated God's dying, rendered it virtually impossible for man to remain in blessed or stubborn ignorance of the fact forever. If what science, particularly biology and geology, was discovering were true, eventually everyone would find out about it. Man has reached a stage in his history at which he has become aware that the old comfortable myths were untrue. Yet Hardy understood and sympathized with those who retreated from the evidence by denying that God is dead, even

though His funeral was being conducted in their presence.

Some in the background then I saw,
Sweet women, youths, men, all incredulous,
Who chimed: "This is a counterfeit of straw,
This requiem mockery! Still he lives to us!"
(Poems, 308-9)

For those, however, who experienced God's death, the most imminent and momentous question is "thou knell who shall survive?" Darkling and languid-lipped, man can no longer "lie down liegely at the eventide / And feel a blest assurance he [*is*] there!"

In spite of man's abandoned condition, though, he need not despair. Hardy is often bleak and pessimistic and desperate, but he is not always so. Paradoxically, at the time of God's death, when we would expect Hardy to be most pessimistic and desperate, he projects a hope for man's continuation. Like Nietzsche, Hardy finds in the death of God a new beginning for man, the birth of a new man, so to speak. It seems that man must experience an existential bankruptcy before he becomes aware of his new potential for meaningful being.

Accordingly, after the death of God man begins to question how he can bear such loss. Some men seek a replacement for God, someone or something to direct them towards new goals. The same creative faculty, arising

out of despair, that originally produced God is applied to find a substitute for Him.

"And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise?" (Poems, 308)

At this time there appears in the funeral gloom a "pale yet positive gleam." The poem concludes with a certain few, who stood aloof and who "composed a crowd of whom / Some were right good, and many nigh the best," leading the entire procession of dazed and puzzled mourners towards the gleam.

The symbolism of this final situation is ambiguous and may be interpreted ironically or in terms of Hardy's sympathetic humanism. The ironic reading, which sees mankind moving mechanically towards a new, solacing, self-deceiving dream, negates the affirmative leadership shown by the best men among mankind. Rather, the small light, which inspires the great men to assume command over the masses and which represents a goal and determines the direction for man's new and unified action, however vague and unassuring at the time of his abandonment, suggests that through mutual dependence men can face up to his existence honestly in the God-less world.¹ There

is no mention of happiness or salvation in Hardy; the best that can be expected is the deferment of despair through man's reconciliation to the fact of his condition, which the expiring God specified in "A Plaint to Man.

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With loving-kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown. (Poems, 306)

Thus, the conclusion of "God's Funeral" may represent, through the symbolic gleam on the gloomy horizon, the possibility of man's totally and exclusively human sufficiency. As in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Brach," after the Sea of Faith has ebbed, man must learn to turn from visions and turn to one another. In accepting his abandonment and trusting in his best human instincts, man finds that his existence is at least endurable.²

Regardless of the hope Hardy sees for man, though, we must not overemphasize his optimism, which is just as tenuous as Arnold's in "Dover Brach." Although Arnold's speaker turns to his beloved woman and says, "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another!" within three lines he is denying that the world possesses love (PW, 211). Similarly, though Hardy suggests that man's

life can be meaningful through mutual loving-kindness, his novels and poems almost invariably undercut this hope by dramatizing the cruelty of men to one another and their failure to find in love an alleviation for suffering. Rather, love usually increases and complicates misery. Yet, it is only when man is finally stripped even of love that he truly despairs in Hardy.

Hardy's characteristic vision, then, is pessimistic. After the death of God, the decline of religion, and the gradual removal of religious symbols from the land, modern man finds himself abandoned in a meaningless universe; and he is incapable immediately of creating new meaning, new goals for himself. His failure to surround himself with a new, relevant, psychological matrix to replace the discredited religions and their symbols, leaves him terribly alone to deal with the brute objectivity of the universe.

Hardy's world is truly an absurd universe, one that simply cannot be explained rationally. This modern world, suddenly divested of illusions and consolations, occupied a good deal of Hardy's creative interest and commanded an important portion of his artistic attention. In a letter written in 1901, Hardy comments on his awareness of non-rationality in the world.

My own interest lies largely in non-rationalistic subjects, since non-rationality seems, so far as one can perceive, to be the principle of the Universe. By which I do not mean foolishness, but rather a principle for which there is no exact name, lying at the indifference point between rationality and irrationality. (Life, 309)

The phrase "Cosmic Irony" is often applied to describe the scheme of things in Hardy's universe, but the phrase is somewhat misleading. Irony implies an existing order that has been subverted or frustrated. It is ironic, we say, that a man who lives by the sword should die by the sword. The outcome of events is contrary to what was or might have been expected when the principle or order upon which he bases his life should be responsible for his death. In Hardy, however, the nature of inanimate things is unconscious and undesigning. There simply is no cosmic order accessible to man's consciousness, and Hardy sees events as chance collidings of willful and indifferent forces among themselves.³ "Cosmic absurdity," then, seems to be a more appropriate description of Hardy's orderless world.

The absurd theme of a conscious man in an unconscious universe is an important modern concern of Hardy's. His latter-day heroes, especially Jude Fawley, experience a division between intellectual commitment and high ethical

resolve on the one hand, and paralysis of the will and emotions on the other. This division is the structure of the actual modern dilemma the characters face in the last novels.⁴

The appearance of consciousness in man, which is responsible for his awareness of his misery, is an excessive and abnormal development, an evolutionary aberration, according to Hardy. A note in his autobiography, written in 1889, clarifies this theory.

"April 7. A woeful fact -- that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences."

(Life, 218)

Before the birth of consciousness, though, all went well for men. In "Before Life and After," Hardy describes man's blissful, painless existence before he developed a consciousness.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings:
None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
 If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;
 If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
 No sense was stung. (Poems, 260)

Consciousness, the poem continues, introduced evil into the world. The last two lines appeal for the return to the normal state of unconsciousness.

But the disease of feeling gamed
 And primal rightness took the tint of wrong;
 Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
 How long, how long?

"The Aerolite" is another account of man's development of consciousness. Presumably a dream, the poem recounts how

... a germ of Consciousness
 Escaped on an aerolite
 Aions ago
 From some far globe, where no distress
 Had means to mar supreme delight. (Poems, 736)

This stray, exotic germ entered man's sphere

... and showed to us the worm
 That gnaws vitalities native here,
 And operated to unblind
 Earth's old-established innocence
 Of stains and stingings,
 Which grin no griefs while not opined
 But cruelly tax intelligence.

Some seers try to oust "this disease / Called sense," for it does not "work to please" on earth. Again, consciousness is seen as an abnormality by the speaker of the poem, who speculates that "Normal unawareness waits rebirth" (Poems, 737).

Hardy's description of consciousness as a disease and an unfortunate, abnormally developed faculty is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's treatment of the same subject in "Part One" of Notes from Underground.⁵

I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness -- a real thoroughgoing illness. For man's everyday needs, it would have been quite enough to have the ordinary human consciousness, that is, half or a quarter of the amount which falls to the lot of a cultivated man of our unhappy nineteenth century....

In Jude the Obscure, the correspondence between Hardy's understanding of consciousness and Dostoevsky's is more fully revealed. According to the Russian writer, "suffering is the sole origin of consciousness." Likewise, in Hardy's novel, Jude's entire existence is defined in terms of his own suffering. At the age of eleven, Jude had already "felt the pricks of life somewhat before his time." He could not scare away the rooks in Farmer Troutham's cornfields, for they seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them (Jude, 11). The narrator of the novel reflects at this

time on Jude's awareness of the widespread suffering in the world.

This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to echo a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again. (Jude, 13)

As Jude matures and develops self-knowledge, he comes to see that much of his suffering is caused by his acute sensitivity. He tells Sue, after they have been unable to contract a marriage, "We are horribly sensitive; that's really what's the matter with us, Sue!" (Jude, 345).

Because of his extreme sensitivity, Jude Fawley is subject to occasional fits of depression. He is an idealist, a dreamer whose aspirations are often impossible to achieve; occasionally, he becomes deeply frustrated and seeks relief in getting drunk. The drinking results from intense depression, which Hardy sees as the aftermath of living in dreams.⁵ Jude thinks of himself as one of "the despairing worthless (Jude, 82)" and as a "vicious character (Jude, 141)" who cannot bear the "hell of conscious failure." He is acutely aware of his isolation, and when he runs to Sue after blaspheming in the pub, he asks her not to "hate me and despise me like all the rest of the world" (Jude, 146). He feels he

could easily give up drink "if I had any kind of hope to support me?" (Jude, 149).

The depression recurs often in the novel, clearly the result of Jude's over-sensitive personality. It is significant that Hardy sees depression as one of modern man's "diseases," an unfortunate but characteristic malady of modern times. Matthew Arnold, in the "Modern Element in Literature," makes particular note of the causes of depression and ennui in modern times.

The predominance of thought, of reflection, in modern epochs is not without its penalties; in the unsound, in the over-tasked, in the over-sensitive, it has produced the most painful, the most lamentable results; it has produced a state of feeling unknown to less enlightened but perhaps healthier epochs -- the feeling of depression, the feeling of ennui. Depression and ennui; these are the characteristics stamped on how many of the representative works of modern times?

Dostoevsky was aware that, though "consciousness is the greatest misfortune for man, yet . . . man prizes it and would not give it up for any satisfaction."⁸ Nor did Hardy feel that consciousness was an entirely negative faculty. Just as it is responsible for man's experience of evil and suffering, consciousness is necessary for his enjoyment of whatever good exists. The speaker in "I Travel as a Phantom Now" questions

whether "Man's consciousness / Was a mistake of God's"
until he meets an obviously good or pleasant person.

And next I meet you, and I pause
And think that if mistake it were,
As some have said, O then it was
One that I well can bear! (Poems, 429-30)

Furthermore, man's consciousness is his only means, however limited, of finding and understanding his place in the universe. He has rejected the discredited religious orientations and the abstract philosophical definitions of man's position in the world, so that the only source of knowledge is his own experience. Without consciousness, choice is impossible and man's actions become inhumanly mechanical. I will have more to say about choice and freedom later, though. In regard to Hardy's treatment of consciousness, it is sufficient to point out here that, as is so often the case in his work, the ambivalence of paradox characterizes his thought. Though he recognizes the evils of consciousness, he is aware of its positive value as well. This ability to see important issues in their full complexity is often overlooked by critics who are thesis-bound or who have used a tag to sum Hardy up.

Nevertheless, Hardy does stress the unfortunate

consequences of consciousness. His vision of life is basically tragic, which is in part responsible for the appearance of so much suffering in his works.⁹ Simply to be born is a tragedy, and Hardy has written a poem "To an Unborn Pauper Child" in which the speaker wishes the child would never enter the world. The common lot of man is to suffer in a world where "Explain none can / Life's pending plan" (Poems, 116). It would be better not to be born than to experience consciousness, but man cannot choose, of course, whether he will be born or not.

Hardy believed, as we have seen above, that the evolutionary development of a higher and finer consciousness would only increase the disproportion between man's aspirations and their possible modes of fruition.¹⁰ That man's consciousness is already beyond the point at which satisfaction in the world is any longer possible is the message of "The Mother Mourns." Man finds blemishes throughout Mother Nature's domain, causing her to complain.

"He holds as inept his own soul-shell--
My deftest achievement--
Contemns me for fitful inventions
Ill-timed and inane:

"No more sees my sun as a Sanct-shape,
My moon as the Night-queen,
My stars as august and sublime ones
That influences rain.

"Reckons gross and ignoble my teaching,
 Immoral my story,
 My love-lights a lure that my species
 May gather and gain. (Poems, 102)

Rather, man would like an opportunity to create the world over, make it a more satisfactory place to support his existence.

" 'Give me,' he has said, 'but the matter
 And means the gods let her,
 My brain could evolve a creation
 More seemly, more sane!'

Mother Nature's indignant displeasure with man implies a criticism that Empedocles makes explicitly in Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna." Empedocles asks man:

What makes thee struggle and rave?
 Why are men ill at ease?--
 'Tis that the lot they have
 Fails their own will to please; ...

And why is it, that still
 Man with his lot thus fights?--
 'Tis that he makes this will
 The measure of his rights. ...

How deep a fault is this;
 Couldst thou but once discern
 Thou hast no right to bliss,
 No title from the Gods to welfare and repose. ...
 (PW, 417)

Man, to Empedocles, is some rude guest who

Would change, where'er he roams
 The manners there profess'd
 To those he brings from home --
 We mark not the world's course, but would have
it take ours. (PW, 419)

Arnold concisely sums up man's condition, as seen in both his work and Hardy's. The summary also appears in "Empedocles"

We mortals are no kings
For each of whom to sway
A new-made world up-springs,
Meant merely for his play;
No, we are strangers here; the world is from
of old. (PW, 418)

This divorce between man and his environment, the actor and his setting, as Albert Camus puts it, is properly the feeling of absurdity. Man feels an alien, a stranger, exiled without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land.¹¹

The theme of man's alienation appears in a vast number of modern works, but rarely is it handled with such poignancy as in Hardy's brief poem "The Imprecipient; (At A Cathedral Service)." The speaker's simple, matter-of-fact recital of his estrangement from his fellow men is characterized by a courageous, honest acceptance of his unfortunate plight.

That with this bright believing band
I have no claim to be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining-land,
Is a strange destiny. (Poems, 59)

Not only is the speaker spiritually alienated, he is also socially ostracized for his "infidelity." It is a mystery to him why he cannot find the joys his fellow neighbors have found, and he is pained by their lack of consideration for his honest doubts.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know; since it be
That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's-Well to me.
My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity!

It is not that he will not admit that blessed things exist. He would, if he could honestly do so. But it is impossible.

O, doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully!

Alienated man is a victim of his own perceptive, reasoning consciousness. His estrangement begins when he realizes that the world is not made to accommodate his desires, and he becomes more and more estranged in proportion to his reasoning powers. The greater an individual's intelligence or sensitivity, the more malign the world appears to him, until he discovers so many flaws in Mother Nature's fabric that he can no longer believe that "Every best thing ... to beat purpose / Her

powers preordain" (Poems, 103).

The repudiation of Nature's "laws" is but a concomitant to the repudiation of the myths founded on a Providential God. The carved characters in a frieze on a cathedral's facade moan in regret

At the ancient faith's rejection
Under the sure, unheeding, steady stress
Of Reason's movement, making meaningless
The coded creeds of old-time godliness. (Poems, 667)

The rejection of faith, which is necessary for the sincere reasoning man, leaves him also without hope. The unborn pauper child is told how "Hope dwindles" (Poems, 116); the ecstatic carolings of the darkling thrush suggest that he possesses "Some blessed Hope," of which the poem's speaker is unaware and incapable (Poems, 137). Finally, the loss of faith and hope strips man also of youth, joy, and love, as in "Memory and I" (Poems, 170).

It is clear that modern man's reliance on his reason is to a large degree responsible for his alienated, abandoned condition. Reason, after destroying the foundations of faith, leads man into blind alleys. Like Arnold's Empedocles, he loses his balance and becomes thought's slave, dead to every natural joy (PW, 439), "Nothing but

a devouring flame of thought-- / But a naked, eternally restless mind" (PW, 438). Conscious, modern man, a prisoner of his own consciousness, is set adrift in a meaningless world where there are no roadsigns to guide him, no centers of meaning to attract him, and nowhere else to go. Hardy's poem "I Was the Midmost" conveys this sense of dislocation in a meaningless world. In his childhood, the speaker was his own midmost, the center of his narrow-world. As a youthful lover, he turned to his beloved, his new midmost. But in maturity, wherever he turns, he finds no fixed pole to show him his way.

Where now is midmost in my world?
I trace it not at all:
No midmost shows it here, or there,
When wistful voices call
"We are fain! We are fain!" from everywhere
On Earth's bewildering ball! (Poems, 630)

The life and career of Jude Fawley may be seen as an alienated man's search for the midmost in his world. Jude is literally abandoned at an early age when he is orphaned and sent to live with his great-aunt Drusilla. The boy feels unwanted at his foster home, but he does develop an affection for the schoolmaster Phillotson. At the outset of the novel, however, Jude is in tears because Phillotson is leaving Marygreen to pursue a degree at Christminster. Yet Phillotson's example does

inspire Jude to become a scholar, providing a temporary midmost for his life. Christminster, then, early becomes Jude's ruling passion, though his dream for scholarship is not the "strongest passion known to humanity."¹² Jude first articulates his aspiration for Christminster by calling it "something to anchor on, to cling to" (Jude, 24). In view of his heart's longing, though, it is ironic that on Jude's first evening at Christminster, he speaks of the "isolation of his own personality" (Jude, 92). Also, on the morning after his arrival, his first impressions indicate the barbarism, the rottenness, the defectiveness of the place. The picture Hardy paints suggests that the pompous, unsympathetic city will bring Jude little comfort (Jude, 97-8). In the course of that first day, he remained in loneliness, and only when he found himself actually on the spot of his enthusiasm did Jude perceive how far away from the object of that enthusiasm he really was. Only a wall separated him from other young men of the same intellectual desires-- but what a wall (Jude, 100):

Soon after seeing Sue, though, Jude feels he has "at last found anchorage for his thoughts, which promised to supply both social and spiritual possibilities" (Jude, 107). In using the metaphor of an anchor for both Sue and Christminster, Jude suggests that they are equivalent in securing

him from an otherwise meaningless, directionless existence. Unfortunately, both are equivalent only in extinguishing his faith, robbing him of hope, and leading him to despair. Jude never achieves his scholarly ambitions; he relinquishes his religious and altruistic aspirations, and suffers from an unsatisfactory marriage with Sue. He loses his children, his home, his jobs, his health, and finally even his wife. He appears at the end of the novel as he appeared in the beginning—isolated from everyone and estranged from the world.

Jude's inability to find a permanent anchorage in the world is symbolic of modern man's isolation, his separation from everything outside himself. Like the speaker in Arnold's "Self-Deception," he wonders what powers he possesses, what ends he may gain (PW, 210). The anguish that accompanies modern man's abandonment involves him in a continuous round of searching for meaning, resulting in uncertainty, doubt, and depression. His inability on many occasions to act purposefully results from the ennui and depression Arnold ascribes to him excessive thought and reflection. As Dostoevsky puts it, "To begin to act, you know, you must first have your mind completely at ease and no trace of doubt left in it."¹³ The inertia or "conscious sitting-with-the-hands-folded," what

Dostoevsky calls the direct, legitimate fruit of consciousness, victimizes a good number of Hardy's characters. The speaker in the poem "I Say I'll Seek Her" is detained from pursuing his beloved by indecision (Poems, 207); the old maid who followed her father's advice to "Make a spouse in your pocket, and let the men be" is orphaned when the old man dies, "And nobody flings me a thought or a care" (Poems, 228); the "Faintheart in a Railway Train" doesn't dare speak to the radiant stranger, though he wishes he had: "O could it but be / That I had slighted there!" (Poems, 536). Finally, the City Shopwoman speaks for so many of Hardy's characters when, after reciting her dreams for the good life, she faces the reality of this life,

O God, that creatures framed to feel
 A yearning nature's strong appeal
 Should writhe on this eternal wheel
 In rayless grime;

And vainly note, with wan regret,
 Each star of early promise set;
 Till Death relieves, and they forget
 Their one Life's time! (Poems, 577)

Jude the Obscure is filled with instances of modern man's failure to act because he lacks certainty for his actions. Most conspicuously, Jude and Sue put off their marriage ceremony three times because of the strong reasons

they had for fearing a union. But Hardy sees in Sue's excessively scrupulous attitudes towards marriage a dangerous reliance on reason, another of the pitfalls that threaten the isolated consciousness. Her efforts to find a solid philosophical basis for conducting her life violate her psychological integrity, so that her rationalism conflicts with and denies her emotional needs. Because her skeptical intelligence rules out the non-rational foundations of life and security, she cuts herself off from the community, as it is expressed in traditional beliefs and institutions, and from the physical reality of sex. But Sue, as Heilman brilliantly points out, is unwilling to be quite the solitary. For such a person, the anchorite in search of an appropriate society, the natural dream is a private utopia, an endless unconsummated idyl with a single infinitely devoted lover.¹⁴

Ultimately, Sue destroys herself and literally drives Jude to despair. Her early unconventional behavior is revealed as an intellectual pose, an espousal of theories she is incapable of practicing. The liberal thought of her early intellectual heroes, John Stuart Mill, Gibbon, Voltaire, Shelley, has little effect on her life. Rather, the frenzied logic of a Christian maso-

chist replaces all her free-thinking and leads her inexorably into rejecting Jude's love and returning to the bed of the repulsive Phillotson.

Hardy understands fully the futility and destructiveness of Sue's effort to live by reason alone. He knows that the alienated individual, when he is certain of nothing, may attempt to alleviate his anguish by deifying, as it were, his reason; Sue's error is not an uncommon one among modern men who seek some source of authority for their actions.

Nevertheless, the man who directs his life by the dictates of logical reasoning alone is no better off than the man who continually vacillates and ponders and mulls over problems but fails to act. Hardy writes in his autobiography of the inadequacy of trying to live by the abstract theories of philosophers. On the last day of 1901, he recorded this reflection:

After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience. He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life. (Life, 310)

There are a number of important implications in Hardy's advice that we ought to consider. First of all,

it is significant that such a "philosophical" novelist as Hardy is actually anti-philosophical. Like the early existentialists Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Hardy rejects the rationalistic, abstract philosophical tradition. For him, one man's unique experience confutes the most ingenious and logical of philosophical systems. The exception is the rule for Hardy and for all thinkers who treat every man as an individual.

The quoted passage further reminds us of Sartre's statement that man's existence precedes his essence, which Hardy would have endorsed. We have earlier seen that Phillotson, in permitting Sue to leave him and go with Jude, is guided by his instincts, his feelings rather than by reasoning or philosophy alone. He comprehends that Sue's unusual request is sufficiently consistent with her nature, that it arises out of her valid though unsatisfactory marital experience, and that it is an authentic, responsible act, however much it seems to violate the received opinion of what "a wife" is. Phillotson's important decision, which is made out of the fullness of his being, is not an entirely rational one, although reason does play a part in it. Furthermore, it can be seen as the key to modern man's dilemma simply because it is a decision, one which derives its authority

from his complete existential involvement in the decision-making process.

In order to clarify this train of thought, we will have to take a few steps backward to reorient ourselves. Hardy's modern man, as we have seen, is a victim of his own consciousness and reasoning powers, since his advancing knowledge has killed the God he created to allay his first despair. Thus, man finds himself abandoned in a purposeless, unconscious universe. He seeks ethical meaning, but he rejects dogma. He is an alienated and anguished ego incapable of action. His attempt to live guided by his reason alone results in the fragmentation and dissolution of his existential integrity.

Now, it is when man confronts his isolation and considers the implications of his abandonment that he uncovers a new sense of purpose and recovers the will and ability to act. Set apart from all established authority and confused because of the uncertainty of values, modern man learns that nothing remains but to trust in his own instincts. In the absence of a priori authority, man must create his own authority, which he does whenever he chooses responsibly. Ultimately, the seat of ethical authority lies in man's own being. Whatever meaning and value he finds in his life must be the

outcome of his own being, which is continually being defined in terms of his choices, his own inventions. It is a projection onto the cosmic plane, so to speak, of man's personal freedom.¹⁵

The question of whether the freedom of choice and action exists in Hardy's work has generally seemed irrelevant; to raise the question naive. Hardy is a naturalist or determinist or fatalist, the argument goes; by definition, freedom cannot exist. It seems to me, however, that this line of reasoning is inadequate. For one thing, Hardy is an artist, not a philosopher (we must keep insisting on this fundamental matter); his impressions need not illustrate philosophical definitions, and very often they do not. He is a moralistic novelist and creates characters who are confronted with serious moral conflicts. But without freedom of choice, morality is impossible. Hardy does broaden the dimensions of his characters' actions by emphasizing the influence of heredity and cultural conditioning, for example, but he does not leave them choiceless, helpless, and exempt from moral responsibility.¹⁶ Man's freedom is surely limited in Hardy, but it does exist; to insist otherwise is to overlook, for example, Henchard's decision to sell his wife, Bathsheba's decision to post the Valentine to

Boldwood, Eustacia's decision to elope with Wildeve, Jude's decision to live with Sue. Furthermore, we cannot help but notice that these crucial decisions are made in contexts that emphasize the conflicting possibilities of action, showing Hardy's basic concern for choice. In fact, his treatment of choosing and evading is so exhaustive that to call it an exploration of the psychology of choice would be no exaggeration.¹⁷

Freedom of thought and action is not available to all of Hardy's characters. His rustics, for example, rarely make moral decisions. Their behavior and customs remain primitive; they appear not to have developed the destructive, enervating consciousness that plagues modern man. Also, Hardy's works are filled with partially conscious individuals who resemble the giant in the poem "At a Country Fair." This brief parable portrays a blind giant being led on a red string by a dwarf, the former unaware of how much stronger he is than his master. The meek giant, perhaps reproaching his destiny yet doing nothing about it, trots on

Like one Fate bade that it must be so,
Whether he wished or no. (Poems, 474)

The speaker in the parable makes it clear that it is

the giant's blindness, not Fate, that makes his subjection to the "shrawd-eyed little thing" the "sorriest of pantomimes."

There is another type of conscious character who believes he is free until he recognizes the extent to which his behavior is determined. In "The Pedigree," the speaker searches his family history, which becomes a mirror through which he seems to divine

That every heave and coil and move I made
Within my brain, and in my mood and speech,
Was in the glass portrayed
As long forestalled by their [his ancestors] so
making it, ... (Poems, 432)

Dejectedly, the speaker concludes:

"I am merest mimicker and counterfeit! --
Though thinking, I am I,
And what I do I do myself alone."

He fails to consider that, however predisposed to act by his environment and heredity, at the moment of action he himself chooses what course to take.

Finally, there are other conscious characters like Phillotson, who act freely but are unwilling to suffer for their freedom. These characters reject their own wills and succumb to the comfort of choiceless slavery. We shall have more to say about Phillotson later,

particularly in relation to the last choice he makes -- the decision to be a slave.

Our interest must turn now to those characters who choose freedom and accept the responsibility that accompanies it, even though they realize how limited their freedom really is.¹⁸ They appear in a small number of poems and in Jude the Obscure, people who recognize that "Part is mine of the general Will," and who seek to

Bend a digit the poise of forces,
And a fair desire fulfil. (Poems, 480)

NOTES

1. In view of Hardy's admiration for Shelley, one is tempted to proffer a Shelleyan reading of this final situation. The best men are poets, the unacknowledged legislators of the world, finally asserting their leadership overtly. They create or discover in their poetry a new religion for man, the anticipated Idealism of Fancy that Hardy felt would provide an imaginative solace for man in view of the impossibility of finding an actual solace in the world.
2. The humanistic interpretation of the poems "A Plaint to Man" and "God's Friend" is based upon the Sartrean concept of abandonment and the implications for humanity that this situation affords. Abandonment, which is the starting point of Sartre's existential ethics, is discussed in his essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," reprinted in Walter Kaufmann's Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre (Cleveland and New York, 1956), pp. 294-8. It seems to me that Hardy's own ethical theory in Jude the Obscure grows out of Jude's abandonment. At any rate, a discussion of Hardy's insights about modern man's situation and opportunities after the death of God, when considered in relation to Sartre's, serves to underscore his awareness of the implications of modern man's most profound ethical dilemma and to demonstrate the similarity between Hardy's thinking and that of certain modern existentialists.
3. Jacques Barzun, "Truth and Poetry in Thomas Hardy," The Southern Review, VI (1940-41), 194
4. DeLaura, p. 397
5. Notes from Underground, reprinted in Walter Kaufmann's Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 56. "Part One" of this short work has been called, by Kaufmann, the "best short overture for existentialism"

ever written. With inimitable vigor and finesse the major themes are stated here that we recognize when reading all the ... existentialists" (Kaufmann, p. 14). Hardy's treatment of consciousness is just one of the many themes he develops similarly to acknowledged existentialist writers.

6. See Robert B. Heilman, "Introduction" to Standard Edition of Jude the Obscure (New York, 1966), p. 24.
7. The essay appears in Essays in Criticism: Third Series (Boston, 1910), p. 71.
8. Notes from Underground, p. 78 in Kaufmann.
9. However, a tragic vision of life is possible only if an artist is able to perceive both the positive and negative values in his materials and, somehow, affirm the good that is overcome by the tragic catastrophe. An artist who sees only negative values is never a tragedian and generally a failure as an artist. On the other hand, the creator of Oedipus, for example, sees the negative nature of inhuman pride, yet he knows and asserts that man's greatness results from his efforts to stretch his humanity as fully as imaginable, even to transcend his humanity. Man requires pride, in effect, to achieve his fullest manhood.
10. Desmond Hawkins, Thomas Hardy (London, 1950), p. 22.
11. See Camus' "An Absurd Reasoning," in The Myth of Sisyphus (New York, 1955), p. 5.
12. Hardy writes, in the "Preface" to the first edition of Jude, that the novel "attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims. Unfortunately, Hardy did not make entirely clear what man's strongest passion is. Critical opinion ranges from man's sexual impulse to his dream for scholarship. More to the point, I think, is Lascelles Abercrombie's insight that Jude's tragedy results from his "aspiration ... to make circumstance give way to, as well as allow, personal being." (See Abercrombie's

Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study (London, 1927), p.113]. The strongest passion in man is his desire for personal being, and his sex drive, intellectual aspiration, etc., are particular manifestations of the overriding passion to be himself.

13. Notes from Underground, p. 75 in Kaufmann.
14. See Heilman's "Introduction," pp. 28-45, for a fascinating and provocative analysis of Sue Bridehead.
15. See Abraham Kaplan, "Lecture III: Existentialism," in The New World of Philosophy (New York, 1961), p. 106. See also Sartre's discussion of the implications of abandonment, pp. 290-98 in Kaufmann.
16. In discussing Jeanie Dean's unwillingness to tell a lie to save her sister's life (in Scott's Heart of Mid-Lothian) because generations of Cameronian ancestors bind her tongue, Dorothy Van Ghent assesses the relationship between conditioning and freedom in tragic action. The discussion, in her English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953), pp. 116-17, is equally relevant for Hardy's tragic novels.
 We look, then, upon the invincible restriction Jeanie puts on herself as an act "conditioned" by her intellectual environment and inheritance. But we look on it also as a morally independent act; for we have to look upon it thus -- even taking the "conditioning" into consideration -- in order to found our own moral judgment somewhere: a wholly "conditioned" action is a helpless action, relating our pity to it perhaps but not our normative judgment, and Jeanie's action is set before us certainly not to win our pity but to stir our moral interest, our awe possibly, assuredly our judgment.
17. See Morrell's interesting chapter on "Choice and Existence," pp. 138-66.
18. Hardy might very well ask, as Camus did, "What freedom can exist in the fullest sense without assurance of eternity?"

CHAPTER IV

Whenever one attempts to assess the importance of human freedom in the novels of Thomas Hardy, he is confronted by an imposing and authoritative body of critical materials which assert Hardy's pessimistic determinism. Invariably, the "Immanent Will" is extracted from The Dynasts to explain the novelist's determinism. Nevertheless, this central concept, appearing in a poem that is supposedly a final formulation of Hardy's philosophy and a key to the understanding of the novels, hardly supplies the last word on the controversial subject of freedom.

Hardy formulated his conception of the Immanent Will as a part of the mythological framework of The Dynasts. However, it is difficult to overlook the fact that this conception appeared years after Hardy ceased to write fiction. While he had long been considering the idea of the Will's operation as a "vague thrusting or urging internal force in no predetermined direction" (Life, 334), he never completely ruled out man's freedom of will.

On the contrary, Hardy even states that man does possess limited freedom. In a letter to Dr. Caleb Salesby, Hardy writes:

The theory of the Prime Force that I used in The Dynasts was published in January, 1904. The nature of the determination embraced in the theory is that of a collective will; so that there is a proportion of the total will in each part of the whole, and each part has therefore, in strictness, some freedom, which would, in fact, be operative as such whenever the remaining great mass of will in the universe should happen to be in equilibrium. (Life, 449)

Furthermore, the idea of the Prime Force, another term for the Immanent Will, "settles the question of Free-will v. Necessity" for Hardy. While responding to Mr. Edward Wright's inquiries about The Dynasts, Hardy explains:

The will of man is ... neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will (which he mostly must be as a subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them. (Life, 335)

The two letters seem to say essentially the same thing, but there is an important difference in their particular implications. In the latter, man's freedom is compared to the mindless, unconscious free playing of the piano by fingers that are partially independent

of the performer's controlling will. This conception of man's freedom of action is the original and dominant one in The Dynasts, where man is free merely to flow with the drift of the Will, unconscious generally that he is drifting and only rarely motivated to oppose the flow. In Hardy's note that contains his first sketch of the philosophical framework of The Dynaste, he relates his theory of action:

'Mode for a historical Drama. Action mostly automatic; reflex movement, etc. Not the result of what is called motive, though always ostensibly so, even to the actors' own consciousness. Apply an enlargement of these theories to, say, "The Hundred Days";' (Life, 148)

Another note regarding the philosophic scheme of the epic-drama further clarifies the mechanical nature of human behavior. In 1882, Hardy wrote:

'February 16. Write a history of human automatism, or impulsion -- viz., an account of human action in spite of human knowledge, showing how very far conduct lags behind the knowledge that should really guide it.' (Life, 152)

Again, in 1892, Hardy restated the theory of human behavior he employed in The Dynasts.

'June 26. Considered methods for the Napoleon drama. Forces; emotions, tendencies. The characters do not act under the influence of reason.' (Life, 247)

It seems obvious that man fails to use his freedom, relinquishing it in effect, by acting like a mindless, unreasoning automaton. Hardy once wrote, in "Thoughts at Midnight," published posthumously in Winter Words, that he could forgive all man's follies and wickednesses, save the one absurdity of their

Acting like puppets
Under Time's buffets,...¹

But it is one thing to say, as Hardy does, that man misuses or fails to use his freedom; and an entirely different matter to conclude, as the critics do, that man does not possess freedom. While it is true that those who are unconscious of their freedom are not free, there are others in Hardy's works who are conscious of their freedom, who act not only out of emotions but also by the use of reason.

Let us return now to Hardy's letter to Salesby where he asserts that each portion of the total will has some freedom, which would be operative as such whenever the remaining great mass of will is in equilibrium. Hardy seems to differentiate between the free part and the great mass in balance, suggesting that the free part may be distinguishable when it is out of balance with the rest of the mass, when it is in revolt, so to

speak. It is just as plausible for the fingers, if I may return to Hardy's metaphor, to move on to a different tune or cease playing altogether, as it is for them to continue playing. If they are free, they may choose their own course.

Now the concept of freedom manifesting itself in revolt is not unusual in Hardy's work. In fact, it is an integral part of his understanding of man's relation to society, as seen primarily in Jude the Obscure. "Motivated" by the powerful Immanent Will, the great mass of society proceeds on its course, its conduct indicating the disproportion between brute automatism and human knowledge in guiding mankind. Inevitably, though, some humans threaten or actually upset the balance by opposing their being to society's enslaving drift. The Immanent Will inexorably regains its equilibrium, either by swallowing up the rebel and reassimilating him into the flow, or by snuffing out the recalcitrant individual will by the force of It's great power. Paradoxically, though, Hardy asserts the greater human power of the defeated individual over the unconscious, essentially inhuman force of the Great Will as it is operative in the mass of society.² In a single man's unequal struggle with and inevitable destruction by an overwhelming

depersonalizing antagonist, Hardy sees the inspiring though tragic meaning of man's quest for personal being.

Now in dealing with Hardy's fiction, we must move beyond the Immanent Will, however important this concept is for The Dynasts and some of the short lyrics we have already considered. There is but questionable evidence to suggest that the concept underlies all of Hardy's work, and to find the Immanent Will lurking in the background of all the novels is simply irresponsible. Furthermore, it involves the imposition of an external concept upon the fiction, rather than a derivation of the concept from within. But the greatest danger in using the Immanent Will to prove or disprove the existence of freedom in Hardy's fiction is that we may overlook the fiction. As Morell points out, when we recall Hardy's novels after probing the nature of the Great Will, a deterministic interpretation can be made to seem plausible; but it is very different when we read or re-read them.³ As soon as we turn to the books themselves, we are immediately struck by the greater importance Hardy attaches to the characters who are seemingly dwarfed against a vast cosmic background. It is necessary to concentrate on the imaginary lives he creates in the fiction itself rather than on a philosophic framework that exists outside the novels and was not fully formulated until most of the fiction

was written.

As a writer of novels, or more properly, romances, Hardy is primarily concerned with creating credible characters. Like most modern writers, Hardy knows that a person's character is something more than the sum of that person's actions. Yet, because critics have long failed to consider Hardy as a modern writer, they have overlooked many of the modern qualities in his work and have rarely understood his modern insights about character. The problem of freedom, though a fundamental issue in assessing Hardy's tragic works, is only one area of confusion and controversy.

In dealing with Jude the Obscure in earlier chapters, I have given considerable attention to the "absurd" theme of the conscious man in an unconscious universe. The world functions according to the principle of non-rationality and man functions according to his own principles -- reason, emotions, instincts, the irrational. The four major characters in Jude, at one time or another, act with their full being. They are "full of moral decisions arrived at by mental processes certainly ... are men who have decisions to make, and if they do not make them entirely on the plane of reason, it is because Hardy was interested most in that hairline dividing the

rational from the instinctive, the opposition, we might call it, between nature and second nature; that is, between instincts and the habits of thought fixed upon the individual by his education and environment."⁴

Hardy makes it clear in all his novels that the characters bring about their suffering or success by their own freely chosen acts. Heredity and environment, i.e., indifferent Nature, cultural customs and institutions, and the world's opinion, all set limits on man's scope for action, certainly. But a man's character is one of the elements in his environment too, and is of a special and unique nature insofar as it modifies the other elements, affects and modifies them in a manner and degree peculiar to itself. It is in this sense that "Character is Fate," as Hardy quotes from Novalis in The Mayor of Casterbridge.⁵

Yet it is certainly true that some of Hardy's characters act like puppets by leaving important decisions to chance. That Hardy considers such irresponsibility destructive and immoral is evidenced by what his narrators often express directly: that man should be responsible in choosing his course of action.⁶ In his great novels, from Far From the Madding Crowd on down to Jude, misfortune so often results from man's reliance on chance

and his failure to do what he knows he ought to do. Gabriel Oak loses his sheep when he fails to insure them. Bathsheba sends Boldwood a Valentine card inscribed "Marry Me," deciding to do so by the flip of a hymn-book. (It was Sunday, and to flip a coin would have been tempting the devil!) Tess' tragedy is one of happiness missed, partly because of her scruples over telling Angel about the sleepwalking, partly because of her failure to meet Angel's family (Hardy's narrator calls it "the greatest misfortune of her life ... this feminine loss of courage at this last and critical moment...").⁷

To find a successful character in Hardy, we can turn to Far From the Madding Crowd and Gabriel Oak. The solid and reliable farmer follows Hardy's advice to take a full look at the worst to prepare against future misfortune. After losing his flock of sheep because of his failure to insure them, Oak is always prepared against avoidable misfortunes. Even in advising Bathsheba, who was romantically blinded by the charms of Sergeant Troy, Oak cautions against unduly hasty and irresponsible decisions.

But since we don't exactly know what he is, why not behave as if he might be bad, simply for your own safety. Don't trust him, mistress,...

Oak is usually successful because he is in touch with reality and is always ready to modify, deflect, improve Nature's workings.⁹ He recognizes the limitations that Nature imposes on man's freedom to choose and act, yet he works as effectively as he can within those bounds. It is significant to note that after he was ruined, he did not blame a malign fate. Rather, he accepts his own culpability and prepares himself more adequately for the future. Thus he is enabled to prevent the fire from ravaging Bathsheba's farm, he cures the poisoned sheep, and he saves Bathsheba's harvest from the storm. It is clear that "fate," or "the inevitable," or "accident," whatever it is in Hardy's novels that gets the better of his heroes so often, is at least partly under human control. Just as clearly Hardy distinguishes between the responsible people, like Oak and later Bathsheba, and the irresponsible ones, like Sergeant Troy. The remorseful lover complains that Fate cruelly prevented him from displaying his remorse over Fanny Robin's death, and he is totally demoralized when the rainwater from the gargoyle's mouth washes away the flowers he so carefully planted on Fanny's grave. Hardy has no sympathy for Troy, who "slowly withdrew from the grave. He did not attempt to fill up the hole, replace the flowers,

or do anything at all. He simply threw up his cards, and foreswore the game for that time and always.¹⁰ Bathsheba, on the other hand, immediately appears to replant the flowers, wash off the headstone, and deflect the pipe in the gargoyle's mouth.

Although successful characters such as Gabriel Oak occur infrequently in Hardy's novels, there are many who themselves determine their fate by their free choices. By the time Hardy writes Jude the Obscure, he is fully aware of the new threats that the modern world poses against an individual's personal being, and he is insistent on man's responsibility to choose for himself. In a novel that is "all contrasts,"¹¹ Hardy juxtaposes the characters of Phillotson and Jude Fawley, the former generally unwilling to choose, the latter unwilling to avoid making choices. The two men can be seen as slave and free man, or "individual" and "personality," in the terms developed by Nicolas Berdyaev in his Slavery and Freedom. Berdyaev's study of personality can be helpful in discussing Hardy's characters by providing a useful psychological vocabulary that helps us to get at the importance of personal freedom.

We have seen a number of Jude's personal traits in earlier chapters, but it seems necessary to synthesize

them here to get as full a picture of him as we can. First of all, Jude is a complete male being, with all the normal instincts. He is special only in his supersensitivity, and unique in the novel inasmuch as the physical and spiritual needs and desires of man are relatively balanced in him. He defines his own goals, and he has a clear though unsubtle intelligence. Jude accepts the necessity for acting and accepts the consequences of his acts, even when it means giving up external goals and ideals. The basic forces within his being, his need for love and his need for freedom, are brought into conflict when he gives his love fully to Sue. He resolves this conflict finally when he realizes that his freedom is more valuable than his love for Sue. But Jude's denial of Sue is not a selfish rejection of love. Rather, when he dismisses her, he recognizes that she is not worth a man's love. By this free decision Jude affirms that personal freedom is the supreme human value.

According to Berdyaev, Jude may be considered as a "personality." Berdyaev begins his study of personality by indicating what it is not.

Personality is not a biological or psychological category, but an ethical or spiritual. Personality cannot be identified with the soul. Personality has an elemental-unconscious foundation. Man in his sub-conscious is submerged in the blustering ocean of elemental life and is but partly rationalized.¹²

That is, personality is not determined by any factors external to it, but is primal and only partly rational. Berdyaev insists on eliminating all forms of determinism to establish the independence of personality. Accordingly, he continues to say that "personality" is not a part of society, as it is not a part of race.

Personality is emancipation from dependence upon nature, from dependence upon society and the state. It opposes all determination from without, it is determination from within. And even within, the determination is self-determination. . . .

Berdyaev sums up his definition by stating that the "existence of personality presupposes freedom."¹³

This is what he means in defining personality as an ethical and spiritual category. Man must be free to make choices if he is to achieve personality.¹⁴

The relevance of Berdyaev's theory of personality for an understanding of Jude Fawley is increased because of the relationship it describes between freedom and suffering. Personality, the free ground of man's actions, consists of creative acts. As the "existential center" of man's being, it presupposes the capacity to feel suffering and joy. Furthermore,

Personality is not only capable of experiencing suffering, but in a certain sense personality is suffering. The struggle to achieve personality and its consolidation are a painful process. The self-realization of personality presupposes resistance, it demands a conflict with the enslaving power of the world, a refusal to conform to the world.... Pain in the human world is the birth of personality, its fight for its own nature.... Freedom gives rise to suffering.... The worth of man, that is to say personality, and again that is to say freedom, presupposes acquiescence in pain, and the capacity to bear pain.¹⁵

Jude's consciousness of the absurd universe, his sense of alienation in it, and his excessive sensitivity all contribute to the painful life he leads from beginning to end in the novel. His quest for self-realization, which he only finally achieves when he rejects Sue and decides to commit suicide, is interrupted by a combination of circumstances: his early surroundings, in which his intellectual ambitions were out of place and discouraged; his irrational attraction to Arabella; the social code which insisted upon marriage as the proper thing in cases of pregnancy; Jude's own directness and kindness which urged him to play the role expected of him; his periodic moods of disgust and resentment. Add to these his mental and emotional attraction to Sue Bridehead, his masochistic cousin, and it becomes obvious that the causes of Jude's suffering are diverse and complex.¹⁶ Yet Jude finally does

learn to resist the enslaving social pressures and codes, and he is able to reject his own aspirations when it becomes clear to him how much they limit his personal being.

Our understanding of Jude as a free "personality" can be clarified by contrasting him with Phillotson. It has been observed that Phillotson's career prefigures Jude's, and to a certain extent that is true. But there is a great difference between the two men, and the difference is what distinguishes the "personality" from the "individual," in Berdyaev's terms.

The individual is a category of naturalism, biology, and sociology. The individual is indivisible in relation to some whole; he is an atom. He not only can be a member of a species or a community, as well as of the cosmos as a whole, but he is invariably thought of as part of a whole, and outside that whole he cannot be called an individual.¹⁷

In short, the "individual" is not free. His relation to some community, outside of which he cannot exist, involves the objectivization of his being. Unlike the "personality," who is capable of free and creative activity, the "individual" acts in accord with the body to which he is bound and of which he is part. His acts are determined for him, freeing him of the responsibility to choose.

Phillotson, throughout most of the novel, is clearly an "individual." Unable to achieve his ideals, a university degree and ordination, Phillotson gives them up to remain a schoolmaster. He becomes an atom of society, allowing its laws to govern his life. Later, he marries Sue so that she can help him set up a private school. On one occasion, he decides to act freely and allows Sue to go off with Jude when he realizes what an "extraordinary affinity or sympathy" bound them together. With great nobility and charity, Phillotson defies custom and received opinion to heed the dictates of his whole being. But the effects of his peculiar behavior, as his friend Gillingham chidingly termed it, are social and economic ruin. And he suffers.

No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go. He had been knocked about from pillar to post at the hands of the virtuous almost beyond endurance; he had been nearly starved, and was now dependent entirely upon the very small stipend from the school of this village (where the person had got ill-spoken of for befriending him).

(Jude, 432)

But Phillotson, who sticks to his choice and suffers long years for it, finally gives up his freedom when, after Sue returns to him, he takes her back even

though he knows that she can never love him. We are reminded of Kafka, who has said somewhere that a man's choice to relinquish his freedom and become a slave is the last choice he ever makes. In giving up his freedom, man diminishes his suffering, since it is freedom that gives rise to suffering. Phillotson's last choice involves a refusal of "personality" and acquiescence in dissolution in the surrounding world. According to Berdyaev, "Man easily goes that way."¹⁸ It is significant that in taking Sue back, Phillotson's choice is determined by objects outside himself: his work, the social respectability of marriage, Sue's usefulness as a teacher, and her attractiveness as a sexual object. He is once again the "individual."

The importance of Berdyaev's terminology for our contrast of Jude and Phillotson is in its focusing attention on the sources of both men's actions. For Phillotson, the determination to act comes from outside of himself; his acts are dependent upon something external to his personal being. Jude, on the other hand, alone chooses his actions. Even when he chooses socially acceptable acts, he does so because he is Jude Fawley, not because society sanctions and requires the acts.¹⁹ For Jude, character is fate.

Furthermore, the contrast between Jude and Phillotson reveals the importance of freedom as a major theme in the novel. Jude learns that to preserve his freedom and achieve personal being he must reject his youthful aspirations and his love for Sue; his ability to do so is an affirmation of the pre-eminence of personal freedom in some men's lives. Dostoevsky's underground man has more directly stated what Jude's example affirms.

One's own free unfettered choice, one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at times to frenzy -- is that very "most advantageous advantage" which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms What man wants is simply independent choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead.²⁰

For Hardy, who could not conceive of an eternal after-life, man's goal must be personal development during his temporal existence. There is an inevitable relationship between personal liberty and self-realization, and Hardy's dramatic exploration of this relationship in Jude often parallels John Stuart Mill's discussion of the same matters in On Liberty. Hardy claims to have known Mill's essay "almost by heart,"²¹ and there seems to be little doubt that he was influenced

by Mill's powerful advocacy of personal freedom. We can perhaps better understand Jude Fawley's tragic history by referring to some of Mill's ideas in his important essay.

The great theme of On Liberty is that the purpose of liberty in human affairs is to give scope and direction for the expression "of a large variety in types of character ... and freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions."²² Mill felt that liberty and freedom of expression are necessary to achieve the good society: one in which there is the greatest freedom for the competition of ideas, whether in truth or error, and for diversity of personality and styles of life. He was committed to the idea that the mass of the people would somehow rise through education. The government should require that all children be educated, although the state was not the final authority in determining what was to be taught. For Mill spoke of education in its widest sense, knowing that a person could be educated at home as well as in any number of formal situations. All types of experience, furthermore, are valuable in developing the potential of mankind. Mill was so emphatic about this that he actively encouraged eccentricity.

Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded where strength and character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained.²³

Mill's essay is particularly relevant for our study of Jude because it expands the traditional views of human freedom. Simply providing an immunity from the power of the state will not alone insure freedom, as tradition maintained. Mill was convinced that the attitudes of the people themselves often discourage or prevent freedom of expression. In the opening pages of the essay Mill indicates the need for freedom from society's tyranny.

... There needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its own ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs as protection against political despotism.²⁴

There is only one reason for which mankind is justified in interfering with the liberty of any of its members, and this is self-protection. Society cannot decide what is for an individual's "own good."

His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise, or even right.... Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.²⁵

The great originality of Mill's work is his basing his concept of liberty on the concept of a developing person. Liberty is a way of life that man comes to understand and value only by living it. And by living in terms of liberty, man comes to know himself, man becomes himself. The theory of liberty, then, is a "theory of personality, and of the growth, potential richness, and self-realization of the personality."²⁶ Briefly summarized by Mill, the essential theory is delimited as follows:

This, then, is the appropriate region of human liberty. It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness, demanding liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological Secondly, the principle requires the liberty of tastes and

pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow: without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong. Thirdly, from this liberty of each individual, follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite, for any purpose not involving harm to others: the persons combining being supposed to be of full age, and not forced or deceived. No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected, is free, whatever may be its form of government; and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified. The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.²⁷

There is always before us the implication that personal development depends on man's liberty to pursue it. Now Hardy's ideas of liberty in Jude are very similar to Mill's, but while both writers focus attention on man's need wholly to realize himself, this need for Mill is but a means to an end, the improvement of society; for Hardy, self-realization is the end in itself.

Hardy and Mill were just two of the many intellectuals in the nineteenth century who were becoming increasingly concerned with the factors in modern life which threatened to enslave man by depriving him of his liberty. If we analyze Jude the Obscure closely in terms of Mill's theory of liberty, we can see how often Jude's freedom is challenged.

His studying is discouraged by his great-aunt Drusilla, by the policeman who warns him against reading while making deliveries, by Arabella, and by Tetuphenay, the master of Biblioll College, as well as by the contemporary educational system, which barred him from achieving his goals as scholar and clergyman. Jude's sympathetic feelings for all creatures were exploited by Arabella, who knew that he was "such a tender fool" when he saw a troubled woman. Jude's ideas on marriage and divorce were opposed to conventional codes that required married people to continue living together even after love had died. For living with Sue, not being married to her, Jude lost his jobs and was forced to live as a wandering gypsy. In every instance, Jude felt that he had "wrongs no man, corrupted no man, defrauded no man!" He had only done what was right in his own eyes (Jude, 371).

Ironically, when Jude and Sue bring the question of freedom into the open after their divorces had been effected, they illustrate their misunderstanding, at the time, of what freedom really is. Freedom is not a condition imposed from outside the person by some other person, law, or institution. Rather, it is a way of life that man practices when he makes choices out of the energy of his own being. The importance of choice for

human liberty cannot be over-emphasized. Mill expresses it in the following way:

The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom makes no choice.²⁸

Choice, of course, is a prerequisite for freedom, and man's every free choice involves the exercise of his personality. Kierkegaard states that man chooses himself, receives himself by the act of choosing.²⁹ Sartre expresses the same idea less cryptically when he says that man defines himself, actually discovers who he is, by means of the choices he makes.³⁰ In Jude the Obscure, the hero is continuously making choices. The fact that they are contrary to the general will of society and create so much suffering for Jude and his family, forcing him to change jobs, to move often, to live in seclusion and poverty, does not deny Jude's freedom. His internal life is not determined by the external restraints of society, but by his choices to be himself, to do what he must do.³¹ The free man is a "personality," and he remains one even if the whole world tries to enslave him. With every free choice, however, he repudiates the forces of enslavement. His understanding of himself

impels him to battle these forces.

Mill indicates that society tyrannizes over its members by imposing on them its own "likings and dislikings." Berdyaev is even more perceptive in pointing out the subtle and insidious methods society uses to enslave man. He states that "human life is full of unnoticed, more refined forms of violence" which are opposed to freedom and the dignity of man. "Psychological violence plays a still greater role in life than physical.

... The suggestion which reaches a man from his social environment and which he undergoes from childhood may make a slave of him. A system of upbringing may completely deprive a man of his freedom and incapacitate him for freedom of judgment."³² Following these general statements, Berdyaev becomes more specific, indicating the particular means used to violate man's freedom.

The weight and solidity of history use force on man. It is possible to use force on a man by way of a threat, by way of some mental contagion which has been turned into collective action. Enslavement is murder. Man always brings to bear upon man either a flow of life or a flow of death. And hate is always a stream of death brought to bear upon another and doing violence to him. Hate always desires to take away freedom. But the astonishing thing is that love can also become deadly and send out the stream of death. Love enslaves no less than hate. Human life is permeated by underground streams, and man chances unseeingly, upon an

atmosphere which does violence to him and enslaves him. There is a psychological force of the individual person, and there is a psychological force of the community, of society. Crystallized, hardened public opinion becomes violence upon man. Man can be a slave to public opinion, a slave to custom, to morals, to judgments and opinions which are imposed by society. It is difficult to overestimate the violence which is perpetrated by the press in our time.... There is still a more deep-seated form of violence, and that is the strong hand of the power of money. ... It is not directly, by way of physical violence, that a man is deprived of his freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and freedom of judgment, but he is placed in a position of dependence materially, he finds himself under the threat of starvation and in this way he is deprived of his freedom.³³

Berdyaev's forceful discussion indicates his terror at the subtle means of enslavement that are always and everywhere present. Hardy's novel, though it employs a dramatic rather than argumentative method in pointing to these forces in modern life, is not less forceful. The mobilization of hatred against Phillotson for "giving my tortured wife her liberty -- or, as they call it, condoning her adultery," is an instance of society's violent violation of Phillotson's freedom. He is subsequently dismissed as well, and the economic pressure that this involves is more than he can take, more than he will take, at any rate.

Freedom is not as precious to Phillotson as it is to Jude, nor as costly. Not only does society cause Jude

to suffer, but even the women he loves try to enslave him. To speak of his marital failures as a "tragedy of love" is quite accurate.

Jude is a complete human personality, what Duffin calls "the very type of the complete (though not necessarily the highest) man -- half-earthly, half-divine."³⁴ The two women in his life, Arabella and Sue, are only fragments of the complete personality, the former representing the animal nature of man, the latter the spiritual. Both women are attractive to Jude, but each can fulfill only half of his needs. Ultimately he is frustrated by both and he only escapes enslavement by rejecting both.

Berdyaev presents an interesting treatment of the relationship between a "personality's" need for love and love's capacity for destroying the "personality." His discussion of the "tragedy of love" provides a fruitful basis for assessing the enslaving nature of Jude's unsatisfactory marriages.

Berdyaev says that "Personality is bound up with love," and that "there is no personality without passion."

Love is the path to the realization of personality and there are two types of love, there is a love which ascends and a love which descends, love which is eros and love which is agape. Both the love

which ascends and the love which descends are inherent in personality. In the ascent and in the descent, personality is realized.³⁵

Berdyaev indicates that the Platonic eros is the ascent from the world of the senses to the single world of ideas. Eros is not the love for a concrete living creature, but is the love of beauty, of the supreme good, of divine perfection. It is "the attraction of the heights, a movement upwards, an ascent, it is the fulfilment of an imperfect being, the enrichment of a poor one. This element is the determining factor in the love of a man and a woman, but it is mingled with other elements. Sex is imperfection and deficiency and it gives rise to a yearning for fulfilment, to a movement towards the completeness that is never attained."³⁶

The "tragedy of love," according to Berdyaev, "is connected with the conflict of love for a concrete being which belongs to the world of sense, and love for the beauty which belongs to the world of ideas. Not a single concrete being corresponds with the beauty of the world of ideas in the Platonic sense. Therefore, love as eros, love as ascent, love as rapture, must be united with love as descent, love as sympathy and pity."³⁷ Such love, agape or charitable love, does not seek for

its own welfare nor for its own enrichment; it bestows, it makes sacrifice. Because man cannot realize the ideal love through a physical person, he loves the person herself for herself.

Human love cannot be exclusively erotic or exclusively caritative, for alone both types are impersonal. "A union of one and the other is necessary. Exclusively erotic love contains an element within it which is demoniacal and destructive. An exclusively caritative, descending love contains an element in it which is degrading to the dignity of the other man. In this lies the complexity of the problem of love in its relation to personality."³⁸

The "tragedy of love" involves an imbalance between erotic and caritative love. Jude Fawley, a romantic idealist throughout most of the novel, yearns for an idealistic, erotic love. He sees in Arabella, the first woman to attract him, a kind of erotic ideal;³⁹ and even when he decides to marry her to save her honor, he realizes that she is "not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind." Yet, he kept up his "fictitious belief in her. His idea of her was the thing of most consequence, not Arabella herself, he sometimes said laconically" (Jude, 65).

Jude's relationship with Sue Bridehead is considerably more complex. Sue represents a super-human type, and her attractiveness as an erotic lover is obvious. She seemed a "free spirit" to Jude, and she delighted to be "outside all laws except gravitation and germination" (Jude,165). Jude refers to her as "almost an ideality" and "almost a divinity." He uses such terms as "ethereal," "uncarnate," "aerial," and "phantasmal, bodiless creature" to describe her. Sue is the least sensual person he knows, "a sort of fay, or sprite," and she puts Widow-Edlin "in mind of a sparrit."⁴⁰ Ironically though, it is Sue's physical accessibility that contributes to Jude's tragedy. By taking possession of Sue, Jude soils the purity of his ideal and becomes aware of her real faults. In one of the most poignant scenes in the novel, he recognizes his guilt in despoiling his divinity. "'I have seemed to myself lately,' he said, 'to belong to the vast band of men shunned by the virtuous -- the men called seducers. It amazes me when I think of it: I have not been conscious of it or of any wrong-doing towards you, whom I love more than myself. Yet I am one of those men! ... Yes, Sue -- that's what I am. I seduced you You were a distinct type -- a refined creature, intended by nature to be left intact. But I couldn't leave you alone!'" (Jude,414).

Jude realizes that his excessively erotic love for Sue is enslaving him. For one thing, he loves her more than he loves himself. But Sue's love for him becomes excessively charitable after the death of their children. Her compassion for Jude, an impersonal agape, is directed toward the redemption of his soul from sinfulness and suffering, not toward him as a person. It is this indignity that causes Jude to turn on Sue and cry, "Sue, Sue, you are not worth a man's love!" The cry represents a standard of maturity and self-knowledge which Jude only slowly and painfully attains.⁴¹

Throughout the novel, Jude continually relinquishes his ideals when they threaten his freedom. His unwillingness to be enslaved motivates his many choices, through which he attains self-knowledge. The press of stern reality crushes his faith in Sue and Christminster, the idealized anchorages for his being. Like Camus' Sisyphus, Jude is conscious that his torture and suffering are permanent conditions, and he is without hope for any kind of success. Most painfully, Jude is stripped even of human compassion and love.⁴² With no reason to live, Jude despairs and commits suicide. Paradoxically, though, his suicide is the heroic affirmation of his significance as a person.

The obvious question that arises is how can despair and suicide be considered heroic. In what sense is negation of life to be called affirmation of life? Hardy answers this dramatically in the novel. In terms of a pagan ethics, Jude's act may be a heroic affirmation of his personality.

There is in the novel a cluster of images pertaining to paganism. The importance of these images in relation to Jude's character is made clear by Norman Holland, who demonstrates that Jude carries latent within him the seeds of paganism.⁴³ Fawley, who earlier aspired to become a Christian clergyman, undergoes a spiritual crisis and eventually parts company with his doctrines. He rejects the ideals of Christianity, heavenly bliss and reward in the after-life, in favor of worldly bliss in the present life, if such is ever realizable. Jude becomes converted to Sue's pagan views at the same time that Sue is becoming Christianized. The exchange of positions between Jude and Sue gives a kind of symmetrical structure to the plot, but more importantly, it symbolizes the novel's rejection of Christian self-denial and its affirmation of Pagan self-assertion. When Sue's recently revealed Christianity leads her to mortify her flesh and preach self-abnegation, self-renunciation, Jude rejects her and

decides not to see her again. Ward Hellstrom suggests that "it is what Sue represents, what she has revealed herself to be, that Jude rejects; he rejects Christian self-denial, which he sees as hysterical, fanatic, perverse, in favor of Pagan self-assertion."⁴⁴

Hellstrom's discussion is based on John Stuart Mill's refutation, in On Liberty, of the Calvinistic doctrine that man's one great offense is Self-will:

There is a different type of human excellence from the Calvinistic; a conception of humanity as having its nature bestowed on it for other purposes than merely to be abnegated. "Pagan self-assertion" is one of the elements of human worth, as well as "Christian self-denial."⁴⁵

For Jude, on the contrary, the denial of self-will becomes the great sin. His entire life's experience leads him to the knowledge that he must make his own decisions if he is to retain his freedom; for without that he forfeits his personality and becomes a slave. His paganism, which encourages his independent way of life, is based on the principle that man's point of bliss is here on earth. Denial of will has no part in Jude's pagan character. But Jude has given up all of his external ideals and desires, and all he has known is suffering. Alone in the world, Jude learns that to be Jude Fawley, a free man, means to be frustrated, to

be lonely, and to suffer. He stares into the void; then he despairs.

But Jude is not defeated, his freedom is not forfeited, his death is not the result of determinism. For man cannot despair unless he chooses to, and when man chooses, whatever the choice, "he chooses himself in his eternal validity." Kierkegaard's treatment of despair is useful for an understanding of Jude and his retention of his freedom.

One cannot despair at all without willing it, but to despair truly one must truly will it, but when one truly wills it one is truly beyond despair; when one has truly willed despair one has truly chosen that which despair chooses, i.e., oneself in one's eternal validity. The personality is tranquillized only in despair, not by necessity, for I never despair by necessity, but by freedom, and only thereby does one win the absolute.⁴⁶

Jude's despair is a defiant one and he has freely chosen it. Rather than capitulate to the enslaving forces that sought to strip away his freedom, Jude chose to defy them. His defiance can be understood with the help of Kierkegaard, who says defiance "really is despair by the aid of the eternal, the despairing abuse of the eternal in the self to the point of being despairingly determined to be oneself." Defiance "is not willing to

begin by losing itself but wills to be itself.⁴⁷

Kierkegaard goes on to give this type of despair a name. "If one would have a common name for this despair, one might call it Stoicism -- yet without thinking only of this philosophic sect."⁴⁸

If we view the despair in terms of Jude's paganism, as I believe we must, it can be seen as an act of self-assertion. Jude's awareness that to continue living means to continue suffering leads him to choose no longer to live. Terrible though this choice is, it is thoroughly authentic. Yet for the pagan, there is no evil or weakness in the loss of life. Marcus Aurelius suggests that the good man is to approach death, "pure, tranquil, ready to depart, and without any compulsion perfectly reconciled to his lot."⁴⁹ The evil for man is in living in necessity; "yet there is no necessity for us to live in necessity: since Nature hath been so kind as to give us, though but one door into the world, yet many doors out of it."⁵⁰ Epicurus not only condones suicide but even recommends it in extreme cases, where suffering and misery are intolerable or calamity is inevitable. In such cases, "Self-homicide is an Act of Heroick Fortitude."⁵¹ Epicurus writes:

But, albeit there be some Cases so extream, as that in respect of them we are to hasten and fly to the Sanctuary of Death, lest some power intervene and rob us of that liberty of quitting life; yet nevertheless are we not to attempt anything in that kind, but when it may be attempted conveniently and opportunely; and when that time comes, then are we to dispatch and leap over the battlements of life bravely. For, neither is it fit for him, who thinks of flight to sleep: nor are we to despair of a happy Exit even from the greatest difficulties, in case we neither hasten before our time, nor let it slip when it comes.⁵²

It is significant that the last words Jude whispers, all taken from the Book of Job, are a curse on his birth and a wish that he had "given up the ghost" as soon as he emerged from the womb; for then he would have been free without having to suffer throughout life. It was his misfortune to be given "light" in his misery, for his consciousness of his suffering makes it more difficult to endure. Jude's final words, nevertheless, represent the tragic discovery of the novel, and it is at this time, when he understands fully the meaning of his life that he chooses to die. His choice is an assertion that only the free life is worth living and that man can live freely to the end of his life.

Jude the Obscure provides a synthesis of Hardy's modern ethical insights. Hardy explores the situation

of man in the modern world, an alienated, isolated consciousness confronting the void created by the death of God. Man's search for meaning becomes a search for himself, for he alone imposes meaning on the disordered universe. But his quest for self-realization requires freedom of will and action, freedom of choice, and freedom from the various enslaving elements within himself and his environment.

The vision of man projected in the novel through Jude Fawley resembles the existential personality of Berdyaev, a type of character who appears in the works of the great existentialist writers.

The entire world is nothing in comparison with human personality, with the unique person of a man, with his unique fate. Man lives in an agony, and he wants to know where he is, where he comes from and whither he is going It is possible for man to get knowledge of himself from above or from below, either from his own light, the divine principle that is within him, or from his own darkness, the elemental subconscious demonic principle within him. And he can do this because he is a twofold and contradictory being. He is a being who is polarized in the highest degree, God-like and beast-like, exalted and base, free and enslaved, apt both for rising and for falling, capable of great love and kindness, capable also of great cruelty and unlimited egoism. Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche recognized the tragic principle in man and the inconsistency of his nature with peculiar distinctness.⁵³

But because Jude Fawley despairs and commits suicide does not mean that Hardy sees no meaning for man in the modern world. Jude is a tragic novel in which Hardy exacts a full look at the worst situation modern man faces. That many of the social ills and personal violations in the novel are remediable cannot be overlooked, and with the remedies life can be made less painful. But these ills, which increase man's misery, threaten his freedom, and thwart his self-development, are merely the tragic machinery of the novel and secondary in importance to Jude Fawley's life. "No reform of the divorce laws or the entrance requirements of Oxford would by itself alter the chances of . . . Jude's coming to happier ends."⁵⁴ There remain the irremediable ills, the permanent facts of pain, suffering, and death. Amid these irremediable ills, Jude symbolizes personal freedom in a novel that teaches not how to die, but how to live.

NOTES

1. See Morrell, p. 75.
2. It is further paradoxical that the Immanent Will, as it manifests itself in society, is made up of the individual wills of all the people in society. Its unconscious nature reflects Hardy's awareness that most men simply act by impulse and without reason. Furthermore, the great blame that attaches to society for causing human misery is the responsibility of each person whose mindless, and therefore inhuman, behavior permits and perpetuates that misery.
3. See Morrell, p. 74.
4. Katherine Anne Porter, "Notes on a Criticism of Thomas Hardy," The Southern Review, VI (Fall, 1940), 159.
5. See E. C. Duffin, Thomas Hardy (Manchester, England, 1937), pp. 187-88.
6. Hardy's advice to man would closely parallel Arnold's Enpedocles' when he warned against reliance on chance.

We do not what we ought,
What we ought not, we do,
And lean upon the thought
That chance will bring us through;
But our own acts, for good or ill, are mightier
powers. (PW, 420)

7. See Morrell, p. 52
8. Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 223.
9. See Morrell, pp. 61-2

10. Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 374.
11. See Letter II in Life, p. 272.
12. Nicolas Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, no trans., in Four Existentialist Theologians, ed. Will Herberg (Garden City, N. Y., 1958), p. 116. All subsequent quotations from Berdyaev will be taken from this text, unless otherwise indicated.
13. Berdyaev, pp. 117-18.
14. It is necessary to remember that, for the existentialist, ethics is concerned with choosing and not necessarily with the matters of good and evil. There are no eternally established categories of right and wrong, no a priori meaning of life which, beforehand and of its own nature, is. A choice is right because a man makes it out of the energy and pathos of his whole existential being. Not to choose, or to choose irresponsibly, is wrong.
15. Berdyaev, p. 119.
16. This resume of Jude's difficulties is a close paraphrase of Benjamin Sankey in his The Major Novels of Thomas Hardy (Denver, 1965), p. 38.
17. Berdyaev, p. 121.
18. Berdyaev, p. 119.
19. Recall that when Jude remarries Arabella, he does the right and proper thing, according to the officiating cleric. Jude is well aware that it is far from right and proper, but he subjects himself to the ceremony because he would not jeopardize a woman's honor. In effect, his chivalrous idealism and his unwillingness to injure any fellow creature are his motives for remarrying.
20. Notes from Underground, pp. 71-2 in Kaufmann. See also pp. 73-4, where the underground man claims that man may desire what is injurious to himself, what is stupid, simply to have the right to desire. This stupid thing may be more advantageous to man than anything else on earth. "And in particular it

may be more advantageous than any advantage even when it does us obvious harm, and contradicts the soundest conclusions of our reason concerning our advantage -- for in any circumstances it preserves for us what is most precious and most important -- that is, our personality, our individuality."

21. The comment appears in a letter to the London Times, May 21, 1906. See Life, p. 330. Parts of this letter are reprinted in Carl Weber's Hardy of Wessex (New York, 1940), p. 23. See also William Nutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background (New York, 1962), pp. 65-6; and Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy. A Critical Biography (London, 1955), p. 68.
22. "Preface to On Liberty," in Essential Works of John Stuart Mill, ed. Max Lerner (New York, 1961), p. 250.
23. On Liberty (New York, 1961), p. 315. All quotations from the essay will be taken from this text. The essay appears in Lerner's edition of the Essential Works.
24. Mill, pp. 258-59.
25. Mill, p. 263.
26. Lerner, p. 251.
27. Mill, pp. 265-66.
28. Mill, p. 307.
29. Either / Or, II, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York, 1959), 215.
30. Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, p. 291 in Kaufmann.
31. In writing about Jude Fawley, Irving Howe has stated that "we are inclined to see him as a man whose very being constitutes a kind of battlefield and who matters, consequently, more for what happens within him than for what happens to him." See Howe's Thomas Hardy (New York, 1967), p. 141.

32. Berdyaev, p. 135.
33. Berdyaev, pp. 135-36.
34. Duffin, p. 92.
35. Slavery and Freedom (New York, 1944), p. 55. This edition, published by Scribner's, presents the entire text of Berdyaev's book. All subsequent references to Berdyaev will be taken from this text.
36. Berdyaev, p. 55.
37. Berdyaev, p. 55.
38. Berdyaev, pp. 56-7.
39. See Jude, p. 46, where Jude withdraws his "discriminative power" in assessing Arabella, preferring to savor the ideal aspects of pleasure and emotional interest that she represents. On page 50, Jude feels glorified and honored by Arabella's condescension to walk with him. Later, he finds he is "just living for the first time" in loving her (Jude, p. 53). Jude's idealization of Arabella, what Hardy's narrator calls "the embroidery of imagination upon the stuff of nature," is responsible for the emptiness Jude feels when he must be away from his new love (Jude, p. 54).
40. See Hellman's study of Sue in his "Introduction" to Jude, p. 28.
41. A. Alvarez, "Afterword" to Signet edition of Jude the Obscure (New York, 1961), p. 411.
42. Recall that Hardy suggests, after the death of God and the subsequent discrediting of religious beliefs, that man can find new meaning in life through mutual dependence and loving-kindness. Jude is deprived even of these, so there can be no meaning for him outside himself. In himself, there is only suffering.
43. "Jude the Obscure: Hardy's Symbolic Indictment of Christianity," NCF, IX (June, 1954), 50-60.

44. Ward Hellstrom, "Jude the Obscure as Pagan Self-Assertion," Victorian Newsletter (Spring, 1966), p. 27.
45. Mill, p. 311.
46. Kierkegaard, p. 217. The absolute for Kierkegaard is oneself in one's eternal validity. Hellstrom has quoted the first sentence of the above quotation from Kierkegaard in his essay.
47. Soren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, in Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York, 1954), p. 201.
48. Sickness, p. 202.
49. Meditations, in Marcus Aurelius Meditations - Epictatus Enchiridion, ed. Russell Kirk (Chicago, 1956), p. 29.
50. Epicurus, Morals, trans. Walter Charleton (London, 1926), p. 77.
51. See Charleton's "An Apology for Epicurus," in his volume on the morals. No page number is given, but the discussion takes place in the middle of the third page of the "Apology."
52. Epicurus, p. 79.
53. Berdyaev, p. 20.
54. Barzun, p. 188.

EPILOGUE

This dissertation was undertaken in response to the need for broadening our understanding of Thomas Hardy's relevance to contemporary readers. While it is partly true that Hardy's works project a pessimistic picture of a world subject to natural determinism and recount nostalgically the passing of the agricultural way of life in the wake of the burgeoning technological era, Hardy's value for today's readers and for posterity lies elsewhere. Accurate though he is as the historian of Wessex, Hardy will be remembered ultimately as a student of the human spirit's quest for liberation and realization.

The liberation of the human spirit is a fundamental instinct of man. Even in eras of repression, underground movements keep up the struggle for personal liberty. It is not surprising, then, that modern times demand an intellectual deliverance, as Arnold tells us, through which man can hasten his liberation. Now this intellectual deliverance is responsible not only for the emancipation

of women and slaves, the partial conquest of space, time, and technological advances, to cite just a few examples that are almost universally accepted as "good" but it is also responsible for the death of God, an idea which is anathema to the vast majority of men who reject the terrible freedom thrust upon them in the God-less world.

Hardy's relevance for many contemporary readers can be understood if approached in the context of man's universal struggle for freedom and modern man's awareness of the death of God. To many of his readers who are vitally concerned over achieving personal liberty and discovering more authentic, personalistic bases for ethics in a world abandoned by God, Hardy speaks with compassion and understanding, though never with dishonest hope or consolation. He tells it like it is, aware of the magnitude of man's loss after the departure of God. Nevertheless, Hardy sees an opportunity for man to endure the death of God if he can accept his freedom and act responsibly in creating an ethics relevant for his own existence. The guidelines of ethical behavior for Hardy, an anti-Christian in the post-Christian era, recall the Christian mandate to love thy neighbor as thyself; it is with "loving-kindness strong" and "mutual dependence" that man must act. Yet this is the message not only of Christ

but of all the great moral teachers of the world, in whose company Hardy would feel quite at home.

Readers of Hardy have long known that he is a humanist, and just as long they have known he is decidedly anti-Christian. It simply will not do to study Hardy in terms of the Christian tradition he rejects, even though his humanistic ideas are often similar to Christian teaching. For this reason I discuss Hardy in relation to other relevant humanistic traditions: existentialist, pagan, and the nineteenth-century English humanistic tradition of Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill, both of whom were influenced by pagan thinkers, and in both of whose works appear ideas about freedom and self-development that resemble those of certain existentialists.

While such a study as this, which treats Hardy as a modern writer and explores his modern insights, is unusual, it is by no means without precedent. Though I first determined to attempt such a study after reading in Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, and Sartre in a philosophy course, I was encouraged to continue by a few studies that reinforced my belief that Hardy ought to be approached from new viewpoints which take into account some of the findings of modern thought in philosophy, psychology, and theology. Gilbert Neiman's essay, "Thomas Hardy: Existentialist,"

by its very title suggested to me that a further exploration of Hardy in relation to existentialist writers was called for. Irving Howe's "Hardy as a 'Modern' Novelist" gave an indication that some critics were willing to discuss Hardy's occupation with modern problems. Recently David DeLaura's important study "The Ache of Modernism" in Hardy's Later Novels" appeared, in which DeLaura treats Hardy's modern insights in relation to the work of Matthew Arnold, and discusses both modern writers in the context of the Victorian age. One of the implications of DeLaura's essay is that the Victorian period itself is part of the modern era, much more similar to our own than we usually admit. Finally, the most recent PMLA bibliography lists two dissertations, the titles of which indicate the new and worthwhile approaches Hardy students are taking. The first is C. E. May's Ohio University dissertation entitled "The Loss of God and the Search for Order: A Study of Thomas Hardy's Structure and Meaning in Three Genres;" the other is D. R. Mill's Oklahoma State study of "The Influence of Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy on the Novels of Thomas Hardy."

Hardy's works have occasionally been discussed by critics who treat the novels in terms of the findings of modern psychology. The impressionistic psychologizing

of D. H. Lawrence was not nearly as balanced as that of A. J. Guerard, though both were well-read in Jung and Freud. Over the past twenty years, Robert Heilman has returned at least three times to psychoanalyze Sue Bridehead, often with brilliant results. Though all three critics, Lawrence, Guerard, and Heilman, were familiar with the Freudian psychoanalytical method, no one has yet utilized Sartre's existential psychoanalysis to study Hardy's characters, though my study of Jude Fawley is based more on the method of Sartre than that of Freud. One possibility for further research might be to study Hardy's characters, such as Bathsheba Everdeen, Eustacia Vye, Michael Henchard, and Alec D'Urberville in terms of Sartrean psychoanalysis.

Perhaps the most important critical book to appear recently is Roy Morrell's Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way. Morrell writes aggressively and clearly, brings to his subjects a fresh viewpoint, and uncovers some provocative insights. After rejecting most of the current criticism of Hardy, Morrell proceeds to clarify such ambiguous matters as the appearance of the "President of the Immortals" quotation at the end of Tess and the novelist's attitudes towards "Evolutionary Meliorism" and "romantic" or optimistic reliance on chance. Morrell's thesis, that Hardy sees man as free to choose his fate and responsible

for his choices or failure to choose, requires that he eliminate the ambiguities that have caused Hardy critics to label him a pessimistic determinist.

The last two chapters of Morrell's book are the most original, wherein he discusses "Choice and Existence" in relation to the works of Sartre, then suggests that Hardy shares a number of preoccupations with such later twentieth-century writers as Iris Murdoch, Kingsley Amis, and John Braine. Morrell's avowed purpose for making such comparisons is to reinforce his belief that Hardy's historical importance matters less than the interest he holds for modern readers.

The studies surveyed represent important and new starting-points in Hardy scholarship. This dissertation is likewise a beginning, an effort to move forth in a new direction. Needless to say, we can never totally comprehend our greatest writers; but the function of literary criticism is to seek out new approaches continually in the hope of learning to understand and appreciate as fully as possible those writers whom generations of readers have found most significant and most gratifying. Thomas Hardy needs revaluation, and if this study can help to open doors for further inquiry into the house Hardy built, that will be adequate justification for its existence.

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August, 1968

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